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2. **TÍTULO:** Contributions of Using Qualitative Approach in Educational Research Projects (Contribuciones del Enfoque Cualitativo en Proyectos de Investigación Educativa).
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7. **DESCRIPCIÓN DEL TRABAJO:** El objetivo principal de este artículo académico es formular algunas de las contribuciones del uso del enfoque cualitativo aplicado en trabajos de investigación educativa desarrollados por estudiantes practicantes en programas de licenciatura en idiomas de distintas universidades en Bogotá entre el período 2006-2011, apoyado en el Estado del Arte elaborado por Alejandra García León y María Ximena Rojas en el año 2012, con el propósito de enunciar algunas de las razones por las cuales el 100% de los proyectos de investigación educativa utilizaron el enfoque cualitativo como derrotero de su investigación.
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- 10. CONTENIDO:** La práctica docente puede constituirse como el espacio apropiado para identificar los factores adyacentes que hacen de la educación un proceso evolutivo, cambiante y dinámico. Bajo este precedente, el enfoque cualitativo se presenta como la herramienta más eficaz para describir los indicadores que hacen de la educación un proceso no lineal. Es desde la práctica pedagógica que los participantes y en especial los docentes pueden reflexionar sobre sus prácticas, proponer estrategias para mejorar procesos educativos y transformar los espacios en los que las habilidades comunicativas y de interacción hallan su desarrollo. El 100% de los trabajos de investigación educativa propuestos por estudiantes de distintas universidades y aspirantes al título de licenciados en idiomas optaron por el uso y aplicación del enfoque cualitativo dada su naturaleza descriptiva, reflexiva, pero además exacta en la observación, identificación y descripción de los distintos espacios y población inmersos en este proceso y fenómeno. De la mano del enfoque cualitativo, tendencias metodológicas como acción-investigación, etnografía, entre otros fueron utilizados con el propósito de reflexionar, interpretar y describir cada uno de los espacios en que se aplicaron los procesos investigativos.
- 11. METODOLOGÍA:** Es de carácter documental basado en los resultados hallados en el Estado del Arte y partiendo de la lectura y análisis de proyectos de investigación educativa.
- 12. CONCLUSIONES:** El enfoque cualitativo fue utilizado para confrontar los diferentes contextos y población para hacer los procesos de aprendizajes particulares y únicos. Diversas estrategias fueron aplicadas con el propósito de evaluar no sólo los materiales sino también la metodología usada y el currículo establecido haciendo uso de sus sentidos y responsabilidad para dar respuesta a las necesidades de la población estudiada. Teorías propuestas en los trabajos de investigación fueron el soporte para definir y relacionar los indicadores y factores que hacen de la educación un proceso cambiante, optimizando los procesos de aprendizaje y refuerzo de habilidades comunicativas en la lengua materna o en inglés, dependiendo de la población y el propósito de la investigación. Los enfoques metodológicos usados ayudaron a conocer a fondo la población y espacios de intervención en aras de mejorar dichos procesos comunicativos y de interacción. El enfoque metodológicos más prevalente en los proyectos de investigación fue acción-investigación que permitió a los practicantes identificar las características y necesidades de las poblaciones estudiadas dado su conceptualización sistemática y organización.

**CONTRIBUTIONS OF USING QUALITATIVE APPROACH IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
PROJECTS
(Contribuciones del Enfoque Cualitativo en Proyectos de Investigación Educativa)**

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CONTRIBUTIONS OF USING QUALITATIVE APPROACH IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECTS

(Contribuciones del Enfoque Cualitativo en Proyectos de Investigación Educativa)

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RESUMEN. La práctica docente puede constituirse como el espacio apropiado para identificar los factores adyacentes que hacen de la educación un proceso evolutivo, cambiante y dinámico. El presente artículo pretende describir las razones de uso, aplicación y beneficios del enfoque cualitativo en los ejercicios investigativos que subyacen a la práctica docente y que se materializaron en proyectos enfocados a interpretar la realidad enfrentada como lo es el campo educativo. Los enfoques metodológicos utilizados como acción investigación, descriptivo, exploratorio, estudio de caso y etnográfico constituyeron el factor determinante para conocer no sólo las debilidades, sino las necesidades y características en general de la población en estudio y establecer las estrategias y acciones de mejora del proceso educativo.

Palabras claves. Enfoque cualitativo, procesos educativos, realidad social, enfoques metodológicos.

ABSTRACT: Teaching practicum is considered the appropriate field to identify the modifier factors that make the education an evolving, changing and dynamic process. This article pretends to describe the main reasons of using and applying as well as the contributions of the qualitative approach in research practices during the practicum which

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were carried out in research projects aiming to interpret the faced reality, in this case the educational field. The methodological approaches used like action-research, descriptive, exploratory, case study, ad ethnography, established the determining factor to know not only the population weakness, but also the needs and general characteristic in order to reflect upon this and establish the strategies and right actions to improve the teaching-learning processes.

Key words: Qualitative approach, teaching-learning processes, social reality, methodological approaches.

Introduction

Qualitative Approach is the most prevailing research approach when doing research projects in educational field. It goes into phenomena in depth, pulling out meanings from data, analyzing subjective realities like education, and using a significant interpretative richness. Dedicated authors and researchers have been studying the use of it as well as its impact and reliability, like Guba and Lincoln (Lichtman, 2010), since the very first beginning when it was thought in the 1990s. It may provide useful insights about the phenomena of education and can be carried out through other approaches or explanatory inquiries like case study, action research, and ethnography among others, in where the most relevant meanings and experiences provide the understanding of the changing role of teaching-learning and conducted in natural settings as Spradley, Lincoln, Guba and Lichtman (2010) proposed.

The qualitative approach was used in all of the 100% of the research projects analyzed when doing the-State-of-the-Art (García & Rojas, 2012) from Universidad de San Buenaventura, Bogotá. This State-of-the-Art came from the analysis of many research

projects carried out by some pre-service teachers in Bogotá in order to acquire a university degree in languages during the period of 2006-2011. One of the goals of it was, exactly, to identify the diverse research approaches; the methodological trends towards the data analysis, and the main themes in developed. They included, for example, works about designing or implementing strategies to analyze the impact of improving linguistic abilities both in English as in Spanish. Also, there were projects focused on the use of language and linguistic phenomena as well as the identities of students in terms of genre related with the power through the use of the language and its influence in the learning process of a foreign language.

The main findings of State-of-the-Art (García & Rojas, 2012) in terms of the topics were the following:

- a. Data analysis techniques: In agreement with the qualitative approach methodology used in them, the 100% of the consulted projects used qualifications as a data analysis technique. The most prevailing methodology used to do the data analysis was the grounded theory that aims to generate a theory that better explains an action in a conceptual level. However, other methodologies were used in less extent but they were useful at the moment to analyze the reality as the mixed analysis methodology that combines the quantitative and qualitative techniques, and the discourse analysis.
- b. Issues addressed: The most prevailing themes developed in the projects claimed for developing skills and strategies in the teaching learning process. Besides, other projects pointed the reflection upon the practices, the use of TICs, interaction, self-learning processes, and cultural characterizations.

- c. Finally in relation to the most relevant research approach used, it was found that the 100% of the projects were framed into the qualitative approach, which was the fact that arose the interest of the present article.

As a pre-service teacher in foreign languages I am motivated to draw the effectiveness and the contributions of this approach in different research projects carried out. I want to illustrate about the characteristics and implications of the Qualitative Research, guided by the reflection about the contributions of using the qualitative research in educational research projects to seek a degree in foreign languages developed by pre-service teachers from some universities in Bogotá.

To answer this question, firstly a conceptualization will be provided to illustrate the principles of the qualitative approach and the methodological approaches related to qualitative to use with it. In the second section you will find a description about how the research projects reflect the principles in their studies like worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010), to make a value of judgment about the use and effectiveness of the qualitative approach in educational research projects in the third and final section.

The Educational Field as a Social Phenomenon

How we come to see and know reality is a matter that has taken lots of discussions and theories throughout the years. The problem of investigation in social sciences and especially in education, lays in the characteristics of the main object of study, in this case the individual. We can assert for social phenomena all conscious human activity in a society that affect individuals and the society itself. The violence, the wars, the poverty,

the drug and alcoholism are just some samples of those factors that can affect our society which are nowadays, more common in the institutes to educate children but not hidden or isolated from that reality. Educational contexts couldn't be blind to the purpose of looking for concepts and actions regarding positive changes in the society.

However, the theoretical perspective and the scientific research that historically has been used when studying social phenomena is the positivist perspective that has its main place in natural sciences (Sacristán & Pérez, 1992) But the fact is that the social phenomena characteristics go beyond strict boundaries of the demanding of this perspective and aim for another one in where the researcher can interpret and understand the reality, pointing at the individual who is the main object of the study in the educational field. Against the positive perspective that considers the reality as a static phenomenon, the interpretative perspective which claims for a "natural" place to research, states that the understanding of that reality rises up from the analysis and reflection upon that and they help us to understand and transform the practice (Sacristán & Pérez, 1992)

On the other hand, the social phenomena in general show two characteristics that make them different from the natural phenomena: Its dimension and its endless. It means, they come and go and change every time which doesn't permit to measure it in a certain and static way, as you can do with natural phenomena. Social phenomena are facts that change and evolve. They are not lineal. That is why it is necessary to use another paradigm to study the educational setting which takes care of the singularity and the object of study without breaking it up and to conceive the reality as a whole.

The main goal when teaching must be to induce or to cause the reconstruction of the ways to think, feel and act. There is a sense of integrity when teaching that goes beyond the academic performances which can be measured by objective tests. The object of the investigation in the educational field must be constructed by the complex system of communication where they exchange, spontaneously and intentionally, significant facts that affect contexts and the ways to think, feel, express, and act. Thus, the nature of all the procedures and investigations allows the production and exchange of meanings, however the tools and ways to permit this. The indicators of procedures and investigations couldn't be taken as uniform unities to add or deduct. We need to use procedures that lead us to understand the meanings of the indicators and place them in a physical, psychosocial and pedagogical context in where there are shown and conditioned. (Sacristán and Pérez,1992).

The challenge as researches in the educational field is to be aware of using all of our senses to look and listen to the individuals and to increase our knowledge about that reality in where they evolve and are conditioned not only to understand, reflect or interpret it, but also to cause or induce the reconstruction of that reality (Daly, 2007). The-State-of-the-Art done by García and Rojas in 2012 from San Buenaventura University shows that the major percent of pre-service teachers seeking a university degree in languages, were worried about applying strategies to reinforce communicative skills improving the use of another language which is predominating in the world around students. This was done with the purpose to answer some needs from educational settings. Also, was seen that, from around 2009, the students are the center of the teaching learning process and the strategies and tools provided to them were around new perspectives of teaching based on the autonomy, identity and learning styles.

These findings lead us to the main goals when doing research and to the main claims of the use of the qualitative approach which states the naturalistic inquiry to understand, interpret and reflect upon the reality studied. It is necessary to be clear what we want when applying qualitative research: “one of our biggest challenges is to position ourselves in a way that allows us to get beyond what we expect to see” (Daly, p. 15). It means that us, as qualitative researchers, need to turn upside down the reality and go in depth to, not only theories, but also experiences to provide us the tools to understand, reflect and interpret the reality.

In the following lines a conceptualization will be provided to clarify concepts and claims for the qualitative approach. To embrace the object of the investigation in the educational field, the qualitative approach was used to take the reality as a whole and to understand the meanings of the indicators of this setting.

The Qualitative Approach and Its Principles

Qualitative approach, differentiated from the quantitative, is relatively new and born from the necessity to understand and explain the social and particularly the educational phenomena, avoiding testing it by statistical analysis. This position based on the quantitative research caused dissatisfaction with findings that were vague, poorly disseminated and often irrelevant to understand and interpret the indicators of the complex and changing world of the education. Its origin can be assured not only for this reason, but also for other interests that started in the 1990s like the new role of women and Afro-American doing educational research and the broadened of the offerings of publishers that permit the inclusion of this paradigm in different disciplines. The starting point will be the

reason that makes the qualitative research good in terms of understanding and interpreting the social and educational phenomena.

Lichtman (2010) offers a possible definition that compiles the ones proposed by the first innovators of this approach, Guba and Lincoln in their first writings, and by Denzin and Lincoln in the first *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, published in 1994.

Qualitative research is a general term. It is a way of knowing in which the researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters. It often involves in-depth interviews and/or observations of humans in natural and social settings. It can be contrasted with quantitative research, which relies heavily on hypothesis testing, cause and effect, and statistical analysis. (Lichtman, p. 5)

To have a clear idea about the differences between quantitative and qualitative research, she puts forward their natures in terms of theoretical perspectives and made some comments that may light us about the main claims of these methods (see table 1). The assumptions immersed in the process of a qualitative approach (select, reflect, discover, contrast and explain the reality), include, among others, an inductive-deductive dimension which means going from the bottom to the top, requiring strategies to find a theory that explains the data collected first. (Lecompte & Preissle, 2003, p. 42).

According to García and Rojas (State of the Art, 2012), the basis of the research project is the identification of the context that allowed the planning of strategies to define the language as a social phenomenon. To be consequent with this purpose, pre-service

teachers systematized procedures of researches and their social belongings to provide solutions to educational problems. This could be done because of the data collected, their sense of reflection, the reasoning upon the problems, and the analysis of the experiences lived during the observation, application and evaluation of new strategies, and the analysis of results. These elements take an important role in the qualitative nature and make the qualitative approach to be an umbrella that opens opportunities to study and understand the reality in many ways. But it doesn't mean that the inductive thing is the only one element to shape the qualitative research. Lichtman(2010) proposed ten critical elements to take into account when doing qualitative research: description, understanding, and interpretation; dynamic, no single way of doing something; inductive thinking; holistic; variety of data in natural settings; role of the researchers; and nonlinear; the acknowledgements of the importance of words, themes and writing, and the need for in depth study. "These elements go hand by hand of a qualitative research to acquire and go around the perceptual skills" (Daly, p. 11) reinforcing the idea of the use our senses to identify, understand and interpret reality.

The starting point of this article was the exhaustive reading from the diverse research projects compiled in prestigious libraries and universities in Bogotá like Javeriana University, Gran Colombia University, Pedagógica Nacional University, La Salle University and El Bosque University, all of them summarized in The-State-of-the-Art provided by García and Rojas (2012), As an assistant in doing the readings and analysis of several research projects, I had to be familiar with the results in The-State-of-the-Art , leading me to reflect upon not only practices, but also theories that supported the main purposes to use qualitative approach.

Methodological Approaches Related When Applying Qualitative

Qualitative approach tends to understand the teaching-learning processes as individual and social phenomena, without studying them in an isolated way. This is precisely the opposite to Sacristán and Pérez (1992) claimed about the quantitative approach and explained before. The main reason to use qualitative approach lies in the purpose to interpret the impact of the oral communication with teachers/ students in different teaching-learning processes, in and out of the school, for example, or to understand and describe the social and educational phenomena through systematic activities, intending to transform the practices and settings. And to explain realities, pre-service teachers, in their thesis from which the state of the art was established, used different methodological approaches to reflect, interpret and describe:

Descriptive: They used this to inquire self- learning practices among students from languages, to request about different learning styles in kids, young and adult people, all of these based on the observation and the experience of pre-service teachers, embracing all aspects that could determine the course of the investigations. The steps were clear seen like identifying the different characteristics of settings; choose the problem, collecting data, and the description of the process. It is clear that the main reason to use this methodological approach is to describe and comprehend the settings in where they did their practices, as well as the population they were working with.

Exploratory: Pre-service teachers not only inquired, but also generated new proposals to answer the needs and findings in those investigations like studying the adjustment processes in scholar systems from people who were forced to leave their places,

or to generate processes of acquisitions of grammatical structures in a no conventional system of education. They used this methodological approach to go in deep of phenomenon identified, understand its cause, inquiry about its nature and generate solutions according to the needs.

Action-Research: They used it to inquire, explore and propose new strategies like applying software as a proposal for teaching English, or applying the psycholinguistic model as a tool to improve writing processes, to improve and develop communicative skills both in their mother tongue as in the foreign one, or to use ringtones and SMS to the improvement of the listening skill, in order to answer for the specific needs from the population and generated from the practices through the strategies focused to solve the problems detected. All of them framed by the principles and steps of the action research like probing through surveys or observations, the implementation of the new strategy, and finally the evaluation of it.

Case Study: It claims for the research of a phenomenon but because of its singularity or particularity among a group. The case of studies carried in the research projects from universities in Bogotá, from which The-State-of-the-Art was established (García and Rojas, 2012), showed a vague ignorance of the singularities or particularities of the population in settings. Against all odds, case study wasn't taken following its principles. There was a few number of research projects that really used the case study. One of these two projects, a plan was set to establish strategies that respond the needs to a particular population. García and Rojas (2012) concluded that they also used action-research, because of the last argument.

Ethnography: Probably this is one of the most useful models to work the qualitative approach because its nature to comprehend how people participate and interact. The researchers usually are involved to have a vivid investigation report analyzing a specific population. The main strategies to support this model are the observation, the field work, daily fields, and interviews, among others. Pre-service teachers, according to The-State-of-the-Art (García and Rojas, 2012), were faithful to the principles of this model. They used to live among the population to have a real perspective of the reality. This was seen in projects that included the study of interaction in indigenous communities.

Conclusions

Taking into account the question that directed this article: *what are the contributions of using the qualitative approach in educational research projects to seek a degree in foreign language developed by pre-service teachers from some universities in Bogotá?*, and based on The-State-of-the-Art (García and Rojas, 2013), some statements can be inferred in the path to establish the benefits of the using of qualitative approach. Pre-service teachers used at most strategies to evaluate materials, methodologies, and curriculum with a clear sense to respond to the needs of the population studied. They made use of their skills to reflect upon the reality they had to face, and they backed that reflection in terms of improving teaching-learning processes in benefit of the students and the environment they use to take part. Updated theories were a base to understand factors that could influence the environment to optimize the education, the evaluation and the learning process. This is a way to understand the reality in where students are evolving, and conditioned. An enormous commitment with the responsibility to prepare them as researches in order to not only understand the reality, but also to transform it was seen in

the goals the pre-service teachers searched. It means that beyond just facing that reality, our challenge is to reconstruct it (Daly, 2007).

There was also a general tendency to use the qualitative approach in order to confront the different contexts to make the processes unique and appropriate for the population involved. The ten critical elements (description, understanding and interpretation, dynamic, no single way of doing something, inductive thinking, holistic, variety of data in natural settings, role of researchers, and nonlinear), proposed by Lichtman (2010) are reflected in this main tendency to acquire the perceptual skills to identify, understand and interpret reality (Daly, 2007). This perspective allowed pre-service teachers to understand the different contexts and educational fields in where they took place both as observers and participants in order to perceive the reality with the students' eyes. In this process the pre-services teachers were the channel to conduct didactic and methodological strategies to facilitate the learning processes of either he mother tongue or the foreign one.

The most used methodological approach was the action- research. Its nature and features allowed pre-service teachers to identify the needs from a specific population and to work hardly to find out the new strategies to apply, aiming at improving the processes in learning or reinforcing skills in students' mother tongue or the foreign language. This tendency to use action research is due to the systematic conceptualization and organization of this methodological approach in where steps are easy to follow and apply. Pre-service teachers showed a confident opinion about action-research providing the possibilities to develop new processes in search of the transformation of that reality. This methodological approach is a way to reflect in our practices insofar that directs us to inquiry about the

needs, problems and characteristics of the population by collecting data in our everyday practice and analyze it in order to make decisions about our future practice.

From these precedents it is easy to understand why the qualitative approach was used 100% in the research projects related in the-State-of-the-Art (García and Rojas, 2012). The qualitative approach fits well when understanding a phenomenon which is changing, different from one context to another, evolving and, why not, unpredictable. The interpretative perspective permitted pre-service teachers to inquiry about the population, their practice, and their goals and what they acquire and find will be the starting point for future researches to go in deep to a new reality and reflect about what they need to transform.

The qualitative approach makes possible to understand and interpret the realities that pre-service teachers, and of course teachers, are facing in their practices due to its main goal to identify the structures and determine the functions guided by the description of the conditions of the population and settings. This approach leads to study the phenomenon as a whole to understand the context in where they are involved making out the social politics, economic, cultural and historic dynamics that affect the population, and also how those dynamic process are affected by the population. All the strategies to collect information serve to the purpose to inquiry about the setting and the population. It means that qualitative approach lies in the clear objective to use techniques to collect information to make the research clear and reliable.

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TABLES

Table 1. Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative Methods of Research by Lichtman (2010. p. 9)

Theoretical	Qualitative	Quantitative
Nature of Reality	Multiple realities. Reality is constructed by the observer.	Single reality. In a well-designed study, a reasonable approximation of reality can be observed.
Role of Researcher	Researcher is central to any study. Interpretations are based on researcher's experience and background.	Researcher tries to remain outside of the system, keeping biases to a minimum.
Ways of Knowing	Multiple ways of knowing. We can learn about something in many ways.	Best way of knowing is through the process of science.

LICENCIATURA EN EDUCACIÓN BÁSICA CON ÉNFASIS EN MATEMÁTICAS, HUMANIDADES Y LENGUA CASTELLANA
FACULTAD DE ESTUDIOS A DISTANCIA SEMESTRE VIII CREAD SOATÁ 2016 UNIT 1: "REMEMBERING PAST EVENTS AND
EVENTS THAT WERE HAPPENING" Competencias Específicas: Describe en forma oral y escrita situaciones o eventos que
sucedieron o que estuvieron ocurriendo en un momento determinado. Practica la pronunciación, el ritmo y la acentuación a través
de diálogos y narraciones Solicita y brinda información sobre situaciones reales de comunicación empleando las temáticas de la
unidad. 5. La docente ira revisando el trabajo de cada uno de los grupos para notar el rendimiento y el entendimiento del tema.
EVALUACION. Trabajo de Grado no publicado para optar por el título de Licenciado en Relaciones Industriales. 2006. View 3
excerpts. Highly influential. Psicología Económica: construcción social del dinero en Venezuela. Ponencia presentada en el II
Encuentro de Psicología. A Capriles. Psicología Económica: construcción social del dinero en Venezuela. Ponencia presentada en
el II Encuentro de Psicología. 2006. View 3 excerpts. Highly influential. Trabajo informal, sexo y cultura: el comercio callejero e informal
en el sur de Brasil. S Veleda. Tesis de Maestría no publicada.