Flexibility in research: dealing with adversity

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The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley.

~ Robert Burns

Translation from Scots for today: “the best-laid plans of students often go wrong.”
COVID-19: The New Corona Virus Upsetting Our World

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Edwin van Teijlingen
The 2020 pandemic and the associated lockdown messed up many lives.

But, PhD research hardly ever (never?) goes to plan.
PhD: typically not on time

Edwin's PhD supervisees

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>PhD in 3 yrs</td>
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<tr>
<td>PhD early</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>PhD late</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>PhD lost</td>
<td>5</td>
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PhD projects are unique and develop over time. Some examples of things not going as expected for my PhD students prior to COVID-19.
For those of you ‘observing’
Document your fieldwork

Using Mixed-methods Research in Health & Education in Nepal
Preeti Mahato¹, Catherine Angello², Edwin van Teijlingen², and Padam P. Simkhada³

ABSTRACT
In the areas of health promotion and health education, mixed-methods research approach has become widely used. In mixed-methods research, also called multi-methods research, the researchers combine quantitative and qualitative research designs in a single study. This paper introduces the mixed-methods approach for use in research in health education. To illustrate this pragmatic research approach we are including an example of mixed-methods research as applied in Nepalese research.

Keywords: high low income countries, health promotion, childbirth, multi-methods, maternity care

Introduction
In the field of health and education, and many other academic disciplines, we recognize three major research approaches. Starting with quantitative research, an approach which uses questionnaire surveys and other numerical data sources addresses the ‘How many questions.’ Secondly, there is qualitative research which uses interviews, focus groups, observation techniques and creative approaches to address the ‘Why questions.’ Thirdly, we combine quantitative and qualitative research methods in mixed-methods approach. This paper outlines the mixed-methods approach for use in health and education a research in Nepal.

Outline of mixed-methods
Mixed-methods research is widely used by researchers as a pragmatic method to conduct research into education and health sectors. It involves using both quantitative and qualitative research methods, and at some point integrating the two forms of data/ findings (Steckler et al., 1992). We use mixed-methods research as it gives us a more comprehensive insight into a research problem than can be provided by the qualitative approach alone. Mixed-methods research is often referred to as pragmatic research designs and are based a different theoretical underpinning (Creswell 2010). According to Rossman (1985), the pragmatic mixed-methods research focuses on the research and uses all approaches available to address the problem. The history of the new methodology dates back to the early 1990s and was based on a work in diverse field including sciences, management, education (2013).

Mixed-methods research has two main reasons: first, both quantitative ‘how many’ and ‘why’ questions; secondly, mixed-methods research provides and the results of which can be combined.

By combining both methods, we can gain insight of the problem from perspectives and is able to

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Surviving Research between Two Guns: Lessons Learnt from Nepal
Bhimsen Devkota¹, PhD
Edwin van Teijlingen² PhD

ABSTRACT
The long civil conflict (1996-2006) between the Maoist rebels in the government of Nepal resulted in over 14000 deaths and thousands others who lost their properties. During this violent war, the Maoists developed bases mainly to treat the combatants and the community people under their control to some extent. This paper is based on author’s personal account of field research using mixed methods study comprising in-depth semi-structured interviews on the former Maoist health workers in Nepal that suggests a few dilemmas the first author confronted while undertaking his research. Most notably is the risk involved to both the researcher and the absence of trust and security on both sides of the conflict. Secondly, the other

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The first researcher experienced many security, privacy, logistical and methodological challenges in course of this field data collection. The study was done in a volatile and violent context. The researcher used a number of measures to address the problems, challenges and dilemmas encountered to enhance the quality of the data and analysis. We argue that there is

Bhimsen carried support letters from (1) the Nepal Health Research Council; (2) his UK university; (3) Tribhuvan University; and (4) the All Nepal Public Health Workers’ Association to show to gatekeepers. He had to be careful to present the right letter to the right person!
• Many PhD projects have been affected by COVID-19, the measures to limit its spread or the anxieties around all this.

• However, this is not unique, most students will experience problems and obstacles; it is part and parcel of any study.
Covid-19 principles, wellbeing and resources

This page has been created to support staff and give clarity on the latest information staff need to know as we manage activity related to Covid-19 and the university’s response.

27 November

Tier 2: Questions and Answers

Q. What is a ‘Substantial Meal’?

A. The Government’s Winter Plan defines a substantial meal as “a full breakfast, main lunchtime or evening meal.” This suggests that crisps and bar snacks will not count, nor will a plate of chips. Essentially, based on past experience on Tier 3 areas, a substantial meal is something with a side. Therefore, a pie and chips, or jacket potato and salad would both count as a substantial meal whilst a pie or pasty on its own would probably not count as a substantial meal.
PGRs are welcome to come along for a test at a time that suits you, so you do not need to pre-book. ... need to have your ID card and a mobile phone.
Every PGR goes through phases, ups and downs, during the life span of the PhD.

“This is the sluggish phase of the PhD. You'll get through it, honestly.”

Three+ years is a long time. It is hard to stay motivated throughout the whole period. Feeling fed up, bored, or dissatisfied with one’s PhD fieldwork/thesis is common!
Things will go wrong...........

Every PGR has a different project, problems, issues, questions, background, etc.

Loads of people will not understand what you’re trying to do!

PGRs often feel isolated. You work alone, with few, or no one else on your project. Whist your friends, partners, flatmates perhaps are in work, have colleagues and a social life.
It is all too common to see PhD students work themselves to the point of physical and mental illness in order to complete their studies. It is less common to see PhD students who feel that they are under such pressure that the only option is suicide. But it does happen. There is a culture of acceptance around mental health issues in academia - and this needs to change.
So much to do, so little time!
Take-away Message II

• First message is no PhD goes to plan.
• Second message is: most PGRs overcome their problems and realise that although their thesis is not exactly what they expected when they started, theirs is still adding to knowledge.
• We all need motivation to get out of bed, to eat more vegetables, do more exercise, be nicer to people ….

• Intelligent people find more motivators. Because you understand better what may help during a crisis.
Try to be flexible in the face of adversity to make your research happen
• Some students face problems accessing their field work site or getting access to data, others face recruitment problems, or conflicting demand on their time (especially students working or with child care responsibilities) or financial issues.
COVID-19 lockdown

- Focus on the things you can do.
- Rearrange order of elements of PhD project.
- Can you use other (online) methods
- Consider other populations
- Consider other localities
- ....
COVID-19 lockdown

• Use opportunities to join online conferences
• What ever you do: write about it!

FHSS PhD student’s poster at prestigious GLOW conference

Today and tomorrow Sulochana Dhakal-Rai will have her poster ‘Factors contributing to rising Caesarean Section rates in South Asia: a systematic review’ online at this year’s GLOW Conference [Global Women’s Research Society Conference]. This year for the first time, this international conference is held completely online. Sulochana’s PhD project is supervised by
Adapt methods?

Consider other ways of doing your fieldwork.

[Article link]

Internet-based focus groups: New approaches to an ‘old’ research method

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Abstract

Focus group (FG) discussions are a popular qualitative research method used in health care and health service research. More recently, internet-based FGs have grown in popularity due to the growth of: (a) the internet, both in terms of technical capacity and number of users; and (b) the improved quality of communication software (e.g. Skype). This paper highlights some of the strengths and weaknesses of conducting FGs online. Building on our experience of conducting traditional and internet-based FGs, we offer some

[Article link]
Adapt methods?

Consider other ways of doing your fieldwork.

Guide to the design and application of online questionnaire surveys

Pramod R. Regmi¹², Elizabeth Waithaka¹, Anjana Paudyal³, Padam Simkhada⁴, Edwin van Teijlingen¹⁵,⁶

Abstract:
Collecting research data through traditional approaches (face-to-face, postal or telephone survey) can be costly and time consuming. The emerging data collection approach based on internet/e-based technologies (e.g., online platforms and email), is a relatively cost-effective survey alternative. These novel data collection strategies can collect large amounts of data from participants in a short time frame. Similarly, they also seem to be feasible and effective in collecting data on sensitive issues or with samples they are generally hard to reach, for example, men

https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/29144/1/Guide%20to%20design%20and%20application%20of%20online%20survey.pdf
Recognise concerns

• Look after yourself. Mental & physical health: “Keep doing what you enjoy”.
• Look after your research
• Look after participants, gate keepers, ...
• Look after each other
• Look after your supervisor
• Don’t be surprised if over the lifetime of your PhD disagreements surface. It is only natural, over such a long period you develop, your supervisors change, your PhD take a different shape, the world around us changes.
Nurture relationship with your supervisors

Three key attributes of good supervisors:
1. friendly, approachable and flexible;
2. knowledgeable and resourceful;
3. encourage students to work and plan independently.

“Don’t ask what your supervisors can do for you, ask what you can do for your supervisors.”
Coronavirus may affect your supervisors in similar or perhaps very different ways than it affects you. Perhaps find out more, in the same way that your supervisor shows an interest in your health and well-being.

“In what way can you help your supervisor to make more time, energy, support available for you?”
• Now you know that your PhD is unlikely to go according to the initial plan, don’t stress too much, try to be flexible, believe in yourself, and work with your supervisors to try to solve problems as they appear on your path
Writing & publishing is good!

- You can’t start writing early enough.
- Write with your supervisors.
- Publish literature review
- Publish fieldwork issues/innovations
- Publish pilot studies from your PhD
- Publish research protocol.
- Theoretical considerations
- ....
“I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn’t know before I wrote it …not to write until I knew what I wanted to say, until my points were organized and outlined ….”

(Richardson 1990: 35)
What is a PhD?

Know what you are aiming for:
A PhD is training for research. In your thesis (viva) show how you’ve developed, overcome obstacles and what you’ve learnt in the process. Reflect on how the coronavirus has affected your PhD.
With her success in publishing Orlanda is a good ambassador for Bournemouth University’s PhD Integrated Thesis format. Such Integrated Thesis allows PhD candidates to incorporate material that has been published or submitted for publication to an academic peer-reviewed journal. Apart from the inclusion of such materials, the Integrated Thesis must conform to the same regulations as the traditional PhD thesis.

https://blogs.bournemouth.ac.uk/research/2019/12/14/new-publication-by-orlanda-harvey-fhss/
Take-away Message IV

What ever goes wrong and which ever solutions you decide are most appropriate/feasible under the circumstances:

Reflect & write about
Focus on the generic PhD criteria and remember:

'It's a PhD, not a Nobel Prize’

Mullins and Kiley (2002)
There will always be problems, issues, barriers, …

• Since you are really clever, you are better at making appropriate decisions, be properly prepared, make the best of a set-back, be flexible, etc.
Thank you!

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