

# Qualitative Mindset behind Phenomenology: Implications to Qualitative Research Training

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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes how the qualitative mindset is fostered by and fosters the phenomenology research approach. A systematic literature review deepened researchers' understanding of phenomenology by clarifying its conceptual foundations, identifying thematic trends through deductive thematic analysis, and evaluating methodological approaches. It highlights the contributions of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Van Manen, strengthening the understanding of the qualitative mindset based on the study of lived experience. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research approach, focuses on understanding lived experiences, emphasizing subjective realities, and embracing the complexity of meaning-making. In epistemological awareness, it recognizes knowledge as co-constructed and context-dependent. Phenomenology embraces subjectivity and rejects absolute truths, instead highlighting personal histories, emotions, and social influences in interpreting experience. Reflexivity is central, with researchers practicing epoché (bracketing) to minimize bias and engage authentically with participants. Ethical considerations, such as power dynamics and informed consent, are also crucial. The flexible, iterative nature of phenomenology allows for continuous adaptation of the research approach. Phenomenology prioritizes depth over breadth, focusing on rich, detailed descriptions of individual experiences while considering sociocultural and historical influences. Researchers also employ a variety of data sources to gain a nuanced understanding, ensuring rigorous analysis and interpretation of themes and patterns. The study highlighted the need for structured, theory-driven phenomenological research training at basic, undergraduate, and graduate levels. It suggests using reflective activities in basic education, qualitative research methods in undergrad, and advanced interpretation and ethical considerations at the graduate level. This progressive approach aligns with the Philippine education system's framework for developing competent researchers.

**Keywords:** Qualitative Mindset, Phenomenology, Qualitative Research, Training

## INTRODUCTION

### Phenomenological Research in the Age of the Information and Knowledge Economy

In the era of the information and knowledge economy, where data-driven decision-making dominates various fields, phenomenological research remains essential in understanding human experiences beyond mere quantification. Phenomenology, a qualitative research approach that explores lived experiences, provides depth and context to complex issues, particularly in education, healthcare, business, and technology (Van Manen, 2016). This research methodology emphasizes subjective experiences, allowing researchers to grasp the meaning individuals assign to their interactions with technology, work environments, and social structures.

**Understanding Human Experience in a Digital Society.** As digital transformation accelerates, individuals interact with information systems in profoundly personal ways. Phenomenology enables researchers to explore how people experience and interpret these interactions, offering insights into user behavior, digital literacy, and cognitive overload (Ihde, 2009). Unlike quantitative research, which often reduces experiences to numerical data, phenomenology captures the nuances of human emotions, motivations, and perceptions. For instance, in higher education, phenomenological studies have shed light on students' struggles with online learning, revealing psychological and emotional dimensions that statistics alone cannot convey (Moustakas, 1994).

**Ethical and Societal Implications.** The knowledge economy thrives on the production, dissemination, and application of knowledge. However, ethical concerns such as digital privacy, algorithmic bias, and workplace automation demand a deeper understanding of how individuals perceive and respond to these challenges (Heidegger, 1962). Phenomenological research plays a crucial role in exploring ethical dilemmas by prioritizing lived experiences over abstract ethical theories, thus informing more human-centered policies and innovations.

**Complementing Big Data with Lived Experience.** While big data analytics offers patterns and correlations, it often lacks the ability to explain "why" certain behaviors occur. Phenomenology bridges this gap by providing qualitative insights that contextualize data trends. For example, in workplace studies, quantitative metrics might indicate declining employee engagement, but phenomenological research can uncover the underlying emotional and psychological factors contributing to this decline (Vagle, 2018).

Despite the dominance of data analytics in the information age, phenomenological research remains invaluable for understanding human experiences, ethical implications, and the meaning individuals assign to technological and economic shifts. By capturing the essence of lived experiences, phenomenology ensures that the human element is not lost in the pursuit of efficiency and productivity in the knowledge economy.

### **Phenomenological Research in the Age of Social Media**

In an era dominated by social media, where communication, identity formation, and social interactions increasingly occur in digital spaces, phenomenological research offers a critical means of understanding the lived experiences of users. Unlike quantitative studies that primarily focus on engagement metrics and behavioral patterns, phenomenology delves into the subjective experiences of individuals navigating social media platforms. This approach provides insights into how people perceive and make sense of their interactions, emotional responses, and the broader impact of social media on their lives (Van Manen, 2016).

**Understanding Digital Subjectivity and Identity Formation.** Social media serves as a space for identity construction, self-presentation, and social validation. Phenomenological research enables scholars to explore how individuals experience these processes, revealing the complexities of digital identity and the emotional weight of online interactions (Zhao et al., 2008). For example, studies have examined how users curate their online personas, negotiate authenticity, and experience self-esteem fluctuations based on social media validation (Robards & Lincoln, 2017). These insights provide a deeper understanding of digital selfhood that cannot be fully captured through numerical data alone.

**The Emotional and Psychological Dimensions of Social Media Use.** Social media can evoke a wide range of emotions, from validation and belonging to anxiety and alienation. Phenomenology allows researchers to investigate how users interpret and internalize these emotional experiences. For instance, studies have explored the phenomenon of "social media fatigue," where individuals feel overwhelmed by constant connectivity, algorithm-driven content, and the pressure to maintain an online presence (Bright et al., 2015). Through phenomenological inquiry, researchers can highlight the lived realities of these emotional experiences, leading to more empathetic and human-centered digital policies and platform designs.

**The Role of Social Media in Shaping Perceptions and Relationships.** As social media reshapes communication, relationships, and even political engagement, phenomenological research uncovers how users experience these shifts. For instance, researchers have examined how individuals experience "context collapse," where multiple social spheres (e.g., family, work, and friends) converge in a single digital space, often leading to self-censorship or anxiety (Marwick & boyd, 2011). By focusing on lived experiences, phenomenology provides a nuanced understanding of the cognitive and emotional challenges associated with navigating social media interactions.

In the digital age, where social media significantly influences socialization, self-perception, and mental well-being, phenomenological research remains vital. By capturing the depth of individual experiences, it provides a counterbalance to data-driven analyses, ensuring that human emotions, identities, and ethical concerns are central to discussions about the impact of social media. This research approach fosters a richer understanding of digital life, ultimately contributing to more responsible platform development and policy-making.

## Phenomenological Research in the Age of a Global Community

In the era of globalization, where digital technologies and cross-cultural interactions shape human experiences, phenomenological research plays a crucial role in understanding the lived realities of individuals across diverse sociocultural contexts. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on generalizable trends, phenomenology seeks to uncover the subjective meanings and personal interpretations individuals attach to their experiences (Van Manen, 2016). This approach is particularly valuable in examining how individuals navigate global interconnectedness, cultural diversity, and transnational identities.

**Understanding Cross-Cultural Experiences and Global Identities.** As people increasingly engage with multiple cultures through travel, migration, and digital communication, phenomenological research provides insights into the complexities of global identity formation. Studies have explored how individuals experience cultural adaptation, acculturation stress, and belonging in transnational settings (Madison, 2019). For instance, international students and expatriates often undergo profound transformations in their sense of self and cultural identity, which phenomenological inquiry can illuminate by capturing their emotions, challenges, and coping mechanisms (Kim, 2017).

**Examining the Lived Realities of Global Crises and Human Solidarity.** Globalization has intensified the collective experience of crises such as pandemics, climate change, and humanitarian conflicts. Phenomenological research allows scholars to explore how individuals perceive and respond to these shared challenges. For example, research on the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the deeply personal and emotional aspects of isolation, resilience, and global solidarity (Smith et al., 2020). By focusing on lived experiences, phenomenology enriches our understanding of how individuals interpret global crises and engage in collective action.

**Humanizing Global Digital Communication.** Digital technologies facilitate global conversations, yet they also contribute to digital divides, misinformation, and the erosion of cultural nuances. Phenomenology helps researchers explore how individuals experience global digital interactions, including online activism, cross-cultural misunderstandings, and digital alienation (Ihde, 2009). Understanding these experiences can inform more inclusive and empathetic global communication strategies, ensuring that digital spaces foster meaningful and respectful dialogue.

Thus, in an increasingly interconnected world, phenomenological research remains essential for capturing the depth and complexity of human experiences within a global community. By prioritizing subjective meaning and lived realities, it provides a critical counterbalance to abstract global theories, ensuring that policies, intercultural interactions, and digital innovations remain grounded in human experience. As globalization continues to shape identities, crises, and communication, phenomenology will remain an invaluable tool for fostering understanding and empathy across cultures.

## Phenomenological Research in the Age of Post-Modernity

Post-modernity is characterized by skepticism toward grand narratives, fragmented identities, and the dissolution of traditional structures of meaning (Lyotard, 1984). In this context, phenomenological research offers a valuable method for understanding the fluid, subjective, and often contradictory lived experiences of individuals navigating a world of uncertainty and multiplicity. Unlike positivist approaches that seek objective truths, phenomenology emphasizes personal meaning-making and the nuanced ways in which individuals experience reality (Van Manen, 2016).

**Exploring Fluid Identities and Subjectivity.** Post-modernity challenges fixed notions of identity, as individuals increasingly construct and reconstruct their sense of self in response to shifting cultural, political, and digital influences (Bauman, 2000). Phenomenological research provides insights into how people experience and negotiate these evolving identities, particularly in the realms of gender, culture, and digital life. For instance, studies have explored the ways in which individuals engage in self-presentation and identity experimentation in online spaces, revealing how subjectivity is shaped by interaction and social discourse (Zahavi, 2018).

**Examining Meaning in a Fragmented World.** Post-modernity is marked by the decline of absolute truths and the rise of multiple, competing perspectives (Foucault, 1977). Phenomenological research is crucial in understanding how individuals construct meaning in this fragmented reality, especially in areas such as ethics, spirituality, and political engagement. Through first-person narratives, researchers can uncover how people make sense of ambiguity, contradiction, and uncertainty in their daily lives (Smith et al., 2020).

**Humanizing Technological and Media-Saturated Experiences.** In a world saturated with media and hyperreality, where distinctions between the real and the simulated blur (Baudrillard, 1994), phenomenological inquiry allows researchers to explore how individuals perceive and engage with these mediated experiences. For example, studies have examined how people experience social media as both empowering and alienating, capturing the paradoxical emotions of digital life (Ihde, 2009). These insights are essential for understanding the impact of technology on human consciousness and social interactions.

In the post-modern era, where traditional structures of meaning are destabilized, phenomenology remains an essential research approach. By prioritizing lived experience, it provides a counterbalance to the abstract and often impersonal analyses characteristic of post-modern thought. Phenomenological research not only enriches our understanding of identity, meaning-making, and technological engagement but also fosters a deeper appreciation of human subjectivity in an era of uncertainty and transformation.

## Study Framework

The "qualitative mindset" refers to a distinct approach to inquiry that prioritizes understanding over explanation, meaning over measurement, and depth over breadth. It is grounded in interpretivist and constructivist paradigms, which emphasize the importance of context, subjective experience, and the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

At its core, the qualitative mindset embraces the belief that reality is socially constructed and multiple, rather than singular and objective (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). This perspective aligns with **constructivist epistemology**, which holds that knowledge is created through interaction and interpretation. In contrast to positivist traditions that seek generalizable laws, the qualitative mindset values **thick description** (Geertz, 1973), **emic perspectives**, and **contextual richness** as central to valid understanding.

Furthermore, this mindset is heavily influenced by **phenomenology**, **symbolic interactionism**, and **critical theory**. Phenomenology contributes by focusing on lived experiences and the meaning individuals ascribe to events (van Manen, 2016). Symbolic interactionism informs the mindset through its emphasis on the interpretive processes that individuals use in everyday interactions (Blumer, 1969). Critical theory adds a transformative dimension by advocating for reflexivity and social justice in the research process (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011).

The qualitative mindset also emphasizes **reflexivity**, which is the researcher's critical self-awareness of their role, positionality, and potential biases during the research process (Berger, 2015). This ongoing reflexive stance helps ensure that interpretations remain grounded in participants' realities rather than researcher assumptions.

Lastly, the mindset values **flexibility**, **emergent design**, and **iterative analysis**, all of which allow for deep engagement with data and evolving understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The qualitative mindset, therefore, is not only a methodological approach but also a philosophical orientation that shapes how researchers view the world and engage with knowledge production.

**Domains and Indicators of the Qualitative Mindset.** The qualitative mindset encompasses several interrelated domains that reflect the philosophical, methodological, and ethical foundations of qualitative inquiry. These domains guide how researchers engage with knowledge, participants, and data.

**Epistemological and Ontological Awareness** is central to the qualitative mindset. It involves recognizing that knowledge is not discovered but co-constructed through interactions between researchers and participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers with this mindset value subjectivity and contextuality, acknowledging that meaning is shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts. Such awareness also implies an acceptance of

complexity, contradiction, and ambiguity in human experiences, rather than seeking simplified explanations (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018).

**Reflexivity and Research Positionality** are crucial for ensuring integrity and ethical responsibility in qualitative research. This domain emphasizes the importance of ongoing self-reflection by researchers about their assumptions, identities, and power dynamics in the research process (Berger, 2015). It also includes being ethically mindful when interpreting and representing others' experiences and being open to changing one's perspectives based on iterative engagement with data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

**Sensitivity to Meaning and Context** involves an intentional prioritization of depth over breadth in knowledge production. Researchers attuned to this domain seek to uncover the nuanced and layered meanings participants assign to their lived experiences. This includes recognizing sociocultural and historical influences, practicing active listening, and engaging with empathy and humility (Tracy, 2020).

**Methodological Flexibility and Creativity** refers to the willingness to adapt research design and methods in response to emerging insights. This domain supports the use of emergent designs, multiple data sources, and the crafting of rich, thick descriptions that convey the fullness of participants' narratives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It promotes innovation in method while maintaining coherence with the research's philosophical grounding.

Finally, **Analytical and Interpretative Rigor** entails systematic yet flexible approaches to data analysis. This includes identifying themes and patterns in complex, often non-linear data; employing triangulation and cross-validation to enhance credibility; and drawing on theoretical sensitivity to deepen interpretation (Charmaz, 2014). These practices uphold the trustworthiness and depth of qualitative research.

Together, these domains foster a mindset that is critically reflective, ethically grounded, and epistemologically nuanced—essential qualities for meaningful qualitative inquiry.

## Statement of the Problem

This paper sought to describe how the qualitative mindset is fostered and fosters the phenomenology research approach" which is relevant to existing research gaps in research education as it addresses the limited understanding of how epistemological orientations are developed and applied in practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). It contributes to bridging theory and practice by exploring how the qualitative mindset influences methodological choices and vice versa, a relationship often overlooked in current literature (Tracy, 2020). Additionally, it responds to the need for greater emphasis on researcher development within qualitative paradigms, an area underrepresented in programs dominated by positivist traditions (Cooper, Fleischer, & Cotton, 2021). By focusing on this reciprocal relationship, the study supports calls for fostering deeper epistemological awareness among novice researchers and enhancing qualitative research pedagogy (Pratt, Kaplan, & Whittington, 2020).

## METHODOLOGY

A literature review serves as a critical methodological tool in qualitative research, particularly when investigating the theoretical foundations and applications of phenomenology. By synthesizing existing studies, a literature review enables researchers to explore the philosophical underpinnings of the qualitative mindset, examine patterns in existing knowledge, and identify gaps that inform further inquiry (Boote & Beile, 2005). In the context of education—especially in the Philippines, where diverse sociocultural factors influence teaching and learning such as language diversity, socio-economic status, religion and spirituality, family structure and community involvement, colonial history and western influence, cultural values, indigenous knowledge and practices, and urban-rural divide—a literature review can help frame the implications of phenomenology for all levels of education.

Phenomenology, as a qualitative research approach, prioritizes subjective experience and meaning-making (Van Manen, 2016). Investigating its methodological foundations through a literature review allows researchers to analyze historical and contemporary discussions on phenomenological inquiry, thus establishing its credibility

and relevance to educational research. Phenomenology can be effectively applied in educational research to explore and understand the lived experiences of individuals within educational contexts. As a qualitative approach, it focuses on how people perceive, make sense of, and assign meaning to their educational experiences, allowing researchers to capture the depth and richness of these subjective realities.

Unlike empirical studies that collect new data, a literature review aggregates perspectives from various scholars, helping to contextualize phenomenology's core principles—intentionality, lived experience, and bracketing (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). However, while literature reviews are essential in qualitative research for providing context, identifying research gaps, and shaping theoretical frameworks, they come with several limitations. These include a lack of primary data, potential researcher bias, and an overreliance on secondary sources, which can limit the depth and applicability of findings. Additionally, literature reviews may rely on outdated or context-specific studies, making it challenging to capture current and local experiences. Despite these limitations, literature reviews remain a critical tool in qualitative research when used alongside primary data collection, helping to guide further inquiry and deepen understanding of complex issues (Green & Johnson, 2015; Lockwood, 2018).

A systematic review of literature enables researchers to clarify conceptual foundations, identify thematic trends, and critically evaluate methodological approaches in phenomenological research. By reviewing the historical development of phenomenology, particularly the contributions of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Van Manen, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the qualitative mindset (Smith et al., 2020). Additionally, examining past applications of phenomenology in education helps highlight key themes such as student experience, teacher perception, and curriculum development (Vagle, 2018). Furthermore, comparing various phenomenological research designs, such as descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology, provides valuable insights into how educational researchers apply the method in different learning environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A literature review is a robust methodological approach for investigating the qualitative mindset behind phenomenology. By systematically analyzing scholarly discussions on phenomenology, researchers can build a strong theoretical foundation, identify emerging trends, and critically evaluate the method's applicability in education. In the Philippine context, phenomenology provides valuable insights into student and teacher experiences, helping to shape policies and practices that support meaningful learning. Given its emphasis on lived experience, phenomenology remains an essential lens for understanding the evolving educational landscape in the country.

The literature review on the **qualitative mindset across various qualitative research approaches** was conducted through an iterative process of synthesizing academic concepts, theoretical foundations, and methodological considerations. The structured exploration of existing knowledge was facilitated by integrating theoretical discussions, methodological justifications, and research implications. The review was guided by key objectives: (1) understanding the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research, (2) examining how the qualitative mindset is embedded in phenomenology, and (3) identifying best practices for fostering qualitative thinking in research training.

**Identifying Relevant Qualitative Research Approaches.** The literature review began with an examination of phenomenology. It was analyzed in terms of its epistemological stance, methodological rigor, and relevance to qualitative inquiry. This classification enabled a systematic comparison of how a **qualitative mindset** is nurtured within its framework.

**Theoretical Foundations of a Qualitative Mindset.** The discussion integrated foundational theories that support qualitative thinking, such as **constructivism** (Vygotsky, 1978), **interpretivism** (Schutz, 1967), and **phenomenology** (Husserl, 1931). These theories emphasize the researcher's subjective role in meaning-making, a core component of qualitative research. Additionally, concepts from **hermeneutics** (Ricoeur, 1981; Gadamer, 1989) and **grounded theory** (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) provided insights into how qualitative researchers develop an interpretative and iterative approach to data analysis. By incorporating these perspectives, the literature review established a **philosophical grounding** for the qualitative mindset.

**Justifying the Qualitative Mindset in Each Research Approach.** Phenomenology was explored in terms of its epistemological and methodological orientation, emphasizing how the **qualitative mindset** shapes data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

**Synthesizing the Literature and Establishing Research Implications.** The literature review synthesized findings on how phenomenology is fostered and fosters a **qualitative mindset**. The review also addressed **pedagogical implications**, linking the development of qualitative thinking to **research training at different educational levels** (basic, undergraduate, and graduate). The synthesis aligned with existing studies on **qualitative research education** (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) and emphasized the importance of **training researchers to think interpretatively** rather than merely applying qualitative methods mechanically.

Hence, a comprehensive, iterative, and theory-driven literature review on the qualitative mindset in different research approaches was conducted. By integrating theoretical frameworks, methodological justifications, and research implications, the review not only mapped the conceptual landscape but also provided practical insights for research training. The process demonstrated the dynamic nature of qualitative inquiry, emphasizing how a qualitative mindset is cultivated through philosophical grounding, methodological engagement, and reflective practice.

## RESULTS

The key differences between **descriptive** and **interpretive phenomenology** lie in their philosophical foundations, goals, and approaches to data analysis. Here's a comparison:

Aspect	Descriptive Phenomenology	Interpretive Phenomenology
Philosophical Root	Edmund Husserl	Martin Heidegger
Focus	Describing the <i>essence</i> of a lived experience	Interpreting the <i>meaning</i> of a lived experience within context
Role of Researcher	Researcher sets aside biases (using <i>epoché</i> or bracketing) to view the phenomenon as purely as possible	Researcher acknowledges their own background and co-constructs meaning with the participant
Use of Bracketing	Central to the method – researchers suspend preconceptions to understand the phenomenon objectively	Not emphasized – researcher's context and perspective are part of the interpretation
Goal	Identify universal structures or essences of experiences	Understand how individuals make sense of their experiences in context (e.g., culture, history)
Data Analysis	Emphasis on reduction and thematic description	Emphasis on interpretation, meaning-making, and understanding lived context
Outcome	A clear, unbiased description of the core experience	A rich, layered understanding of how people interpret and live through experiences

Phenomenological methods can be effectively applied to qualitative research across various fields to gain deep insights into individuals lived experiences. In psychology, they are used to explore emotional and cognitive experiences related to trauma, anxiety, grief, or personal growth. For example, a phenomenological study might investigate how individuals experience post-traumatic growth after surviving a natural disaster. In the health sciences and nursing, phenomenology helps understand how patients and caregivers experience illness, hospitalization, or medical treatments. This approach can, for instance, uncover the emotional journey of cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy, providing valuable input for more empathetic, patient-centered care.

In the field of education, phenomenology allows researchers to study how students or teachers navigate learning

environments, particularly in contexts involving inclusion, diversity, or curricular changes. A relevant example is the exploration of how migrant students adapt to a new school system, which reveals not only academic but also emotional and cultural challenges. In social work, phenomenological research examines client experiences with social services, poverty, or domestic violence. By understanding how single mothers experience housing assistance programs, for instance, practitioners and policymakers can design more humane and effective interventions.

In business and management, phenomenology sheds light on leadership, workplace culture, and employee motivation. Studying the lived experience of burnout among remote workers, for instance, provides organizations with critical insights into human factors that affect performance and well-being. In communication and media studies, phenomenology helps examine how individuals engage with media, storytelling, or social platforms. Researchers might investigate how young adults experience identity construction through Instagram, uncovering the complex interplay between digital interaction and self-expression.

The field of law and criminal justice also benefits from phenomenological approaches by revealing the personal narratives of individuals affected by the justice system. For example, studying the lived experiences of those who were wrongfully convicted and later exonerated can inform policy reforms and humanize legal procedures. Overall, phenomenology contributes empathy, depth, and cultural sensitivity to research, making it particularly valuable for exploring subjective meanings and emotional experiences that are difficult to quantify. This approach enhances the richness and relevance of findings across diverse disciplines.

### Phenomenology and the Domains and Indicators of the Qualitative Mindset

Either way, phenomenology, as a qualitative research approach, is deeply rooted in understanding lived experiences, prioritizing the subjective realities of individuals, and embracing complexity in meaning-making. The matrix reflects the phenomenological mindset, emphasizing epistemological awareness, reflexivity, sensitivity to meaning and context, methodological flexibility, and analytical rigor. Each domain in the matrix is discussed below, incorporating justifications and scholarly references.

**Epistemological and Ontological Awareness.** Phenomenology strongly recognizes knowledge as **co-constructed and socially mediated**. This approach assumes that reality is not objectively given but rather shaped by human perception and interpretation (Heidegger, 1927/2010). It aligns with **constructivist and interpretivist paradigms**, emphasizing that individuals' lived experiences create meaning rather than external truths being imposed upon them (van Manen, 2016).

Additionally, **subjectivity and contextuality are central to phenomenology**. Researchers in this tradition prioritize understanding participants' experiences within their social, cultural, and historical contexts rather than seeking generalizability (Moustakas, 1994). Unlike positivist approaches, which attempt to eliminate bias, phenomenology **embraces subjectivity as an essential component of understanding reality**.

Phenomenology also **fully accepts complexity and ambiguity** in knowledge construction. It explicitly rejects absolute truths and deterministic explanations, instead acknowledging **the non-linearity and fluidity of human experiences** (Husserl, 1931). Researchers recognize that individuals may interpret the same phenomenon differently based on personal history, emotions, and social influences (Smith et al., 2009).

**Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality.** A **high level of reflexivity** is fundamental in phenomenological research. Researchers engage in **epoché (bracketing)**, a process of **setting aside their biases and assumptions** to focus entirely on the participant's lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). This method allows for a more **authentic engagement with the phenomena under investigation**, minimizing researcher influence while acknowledging that complete objectivity is impossible (Finlay, 2009).

Ethical considerations are also deeply embedded in phenomenological research. Since researchers interpret participants' deeply personal narratives, **meaning-making and representation require careful ethical reflection** (van Manen, 2016). Power dynamics, informed consent, and maintaining participants' voices in

interpretation are central concerns (Smith et al., 2009).

Furthermore, phenomenology is **highly iterative**, allowing researchers to **adapt their perspectives based on continuous engagement with data**. As themes emerge, the researcher **revisits transcripts and interpretations, refining understanding over time** (Finlay, 2009). This ongoing reflection ensures that insights remain true to participants lived realities rather than fitting into predetermined theoretical categories.

**Sensitivity to Meaning and Context.** Phenomenology prioritizes **depth over breadth in knowledge construction**. Rather than seeking broad generalizations, phenomenologists focus on **intensive, rich descriptions of individual experiences** (Moustakas, 1994). The goal is not to quantify experiences but to **deeply explore their meaning and essence** (van Manen, 2016).

Sociocultural and historical influences are **recognized and integrated into the analysis**, contributing to another high score. Phenomenology acknowledges that individuals' experiences are **shaped by their historical and cultural backgrounds**, influencing their perceptions of reality (Husserl, 1931). Researchers carefully consider these factors while interpreting participants' narratives.

Empathy and active listening are also critical components of phenomenological research. Unlike objective or detached methodologies, **phenomenology fosters a deep relational engagement with participants** (Finlay, 2009). Researchers strive to **understand participants' experiences from their perspective**, ensuring that their voices are authentically represented in the study (Smith et al., 2009).

**Methodological Flexibility and Creativity.** A defining feature of phenomenology is its **flexible and emergent research design**. Researchers do not follow rigid, pre-structured methods but instead allow their approach to evolve based on participants' narratives (van Manen, 2016). This open-ended structure enables a deeper exploration of lived experiences.

Additionally, phenomenology **incorporates multiple holistic data sources**, including **in-depth interviews, personal reflections, and textual analyses** (Moustakas, 1994). The diversity of data collection methods ensures a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Rich, thick descriptions are essential in phenomenological research. Researchers aim to **capture the full essence of participants' experiences**, using **vivid, immersive language** to convey meaning (van Manen, 2016). The goal is to bring the reader as close as possible to the lived experience itself.

**Analytical and Interpretative Rigor.** Phenomenology **excels in identifying themes and patterns within complex data**. Rather than applying pre-existing coding frameworks, **researchers inductively derive themes from participants' narratives**, ensuring that interpretations remain grounded in lived experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Triangulation and credibility verification are also integral to phenomenology. While the approach does not use **quantitative validation techniques**, it relies on **participant validation, intersubjective agreement, and reflexive journaling** to enhance trustworthiness (Finlay, 2009). These methods ensure that findings accurately represent participants' experiences.

Finally, phenomenology is **deeply informed by theoretical sensitivity**, meaning that researchers draw on **philosophical and psychological theories** to enhance interpretation (Husserl, 1931). However, rather than imposing rigid theoretical frameworks, phenomenologists allow theories to **evolve alongside their findings**, reinforcing their commitment to **fluid, context-driven understanding** (van Manen, 2016).

Phenomenology demonstrates its strong alignment with **subjectivity, interpretative depth, and methodological flexibility**. It is particularly distinguished by **its emphasis on lived experiences, reflexivity, and deep contextual analysis**. As a result, phenomenology is **an invaluable approach for exploring human consciousness, meaning-making, and the complexities of subjective reality** (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016).

Table 1 *The Qualitative Mindset of Phenomenology*

Domains	Indicators	Literature Support
Epistemological and Ontological Awareness	Recognizes knowledge as co-constructed and socially mediated	Phenomenology views knowledge as co-constructed through lived experience and subjective interpretation, emphasizing interpretivist epistemology (Husserl, 1970; van Manen, 2016).
	Values subjectivity and contextuality in knowledge production	It prioritizes first-person experiences and deep contextual insights, recognizing that meaning is shaped by sociocultural influences (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).
	Accepts complexity and ambiguity in understanding reality	Phenomenology embraces ambiguity, seeking to understand multiple layers of human experience rather than absolute truths (Smith et al., 2009).
Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality	Encourages self-awareness and researcher reflexivity	Reflexivity is essential in phenomenological inquiry, as researchers acknowledge their biases and engage in epoché (bracketing) to minimize preconceived notions (Moustakas, 1994).
	Ethical considerations in interpretation and representation	Ethical concerns are central to phenomenology, particularly in representing participants' voices authentically and minimizing researcher imposition (Finlay, 2002).
	Adapts perspectives based on iterative engagement with data	Phenomenologists continuously refine interpretations through iterative engagement with participant narratives and thematic analysis (van Manen, 2016).
Sensitivity to Meaning and Context	Prioritizes depth over breadth in knowledge construction	Phenomenology prioritizes in-depth, rich descriptions of lived experiences rather than seeking broad generalizability (Giorgi, 2009).
	Recognizes sociocultural and historical influences	The approach deeply considers the historical and cultural background of experiences, especially in hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger, 1927/1996).
	Encourages active listening and empathetic engagement	Phenomenological research requires empathetic listening and a close, relational understanding between researcher and participant (van Manen, 2016).
Methodological Flexibility and Creativity	Allows for emergent research design and adaptive methods	The methodology is flexible, allowing for adaptation as themes emerge organically from participants' narratives (Moustakas, 1994).
	Incorporates multiple, holistic data sources	Phenomenologists use interviews, reflective writing, and observations to gain a holistic understanding of experience (Giorgi, 2009).
	Uses rich, thick descriptions in interpretation	The research output is characterized by deep, immersive descriptions to convey meaning vividly (Finlay, 2002).
Analytical and Interpretative Rigor	Identifies themes and patterns in complex data	Thematic analysis is inductive, identifying deep patterns within narratives to capture essential structures of experience (Smith et al., 2009).
	Uses triangulation and cross-validation for credibility	While not always using traditional triangulation, phenomenologists validate findings through repeated engagements and comparison with existing literature (van Manen, 2016).
	Draws on theoretical sensitivity to enhance interpretation	Theoretical insights from existentialism and phenomenology inform and evolve alongside empirical findings (Heidegger, 1927/1996).

Phenomenology has deep commitment to **subjectivity, reflexivity, and meaning-making**. The qualitative mindset behind phenomenology aligns with its **inductive, interpretivist, and human-centered** approach, making it a paradigmatic example of qualitative inquiry.

## DISCUSSION

### Implications for Research Training in Basic, Undergraduate, and Graduate Education

The findings for phenomenology highlight the necessity of structured, developmental, and theoretically grounded research training at different educational levels. Phenomenology enhances the understanding of cross-cultural experiences in educational settings by focusing on individuals lived experiences and the meanings they attach to them. It allows educators and researchers to explore how cultural backgrounds shape perceptions, learning processes, and interactions within diverse classrooms. Through phenomenological methods researchers can uncover the subjective realities of students and teachers from different cultural contexts.

By emphasizing empathy, reflexivity, and the suspension of biases (epoché), phenomenology encourages deeper awareness of how cultural values, language, traditions, and social norms influence educational experiences. This approach fosters inclusivity, supports culturally responsive teaching, and informs educational policies that respect and integrate diverse perspectives. In essence, phenomenology promotes a holistic and nuanced understanding of cultural differences, leading to more equitable and meaningful educational practices.

To develop competent phenomenology researchers, training must progress from foundational inquiry in basic education to structured data collection and analysis in undergraduate education, and finally to advanced interpretation and ethical considerations at the graduate level. Each stage of research training should be supported by relevant theoretical foundations to ensure students develop the necessary cognitive and methodological skills for rigorous phenomenological inquiry.

At the basic education level, students may not yet engage in formal phenomenological research, but they can develop essential reflective skills through structured activities aligned with constructivist and experiential learning theories. John Dewey's (1933) Reflective Thinking Theory suggests that early engagement in reflection fosters critical thinking and deeper awareness, while Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes learning through concrete experiences and reflection, which is foundational for phenomenological thinking. Training activities at this stage include observational journaling, guided storytelling, and perspective-taking exercises. Observational journaling encourages students to document personal experiences with a focus on sensory details and emotions, developing early reflexivity. Guided storytelling, supported by Bruner's (1991) Narrative Construction of Reality Theory, allows students to explore how they interpret personal events, reinforcing phenomenological inquiry as a natural human process. Additionally, perspective-taking activities, grounded in Mead's (1934) Symbolic Interactionism Theory, cultivate empathy and the ability to suspend bias (epoché), as emphasized in Husserl's (1931) Transcendental Phenomenology. By engaging in these activities, students will be able to observe, describe, and reflect on personal and others' experiences using narrative and observational techniques.

At the undergraduate level, students transition from reflective inquiry to structured research, learning essential phenomenological data collection and analysis methods. According to Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, hands-on research experience fosters deep learning and conceptual understanding. Key training activities at this stage include conducting semi-structured interviews, applying thematic analysis, and writing reflexivity journals. Semi-structured interviews are fundamental to phenomenological research, as meaning emerges through dialogue, a principle grounded in Gadamer's (1989) Philosophical Hermeneutics. Additionally, Rogers' (1951) Person-Centered Approach emphasizes the importance of empathetic listening, a core skill in qualitative interviewing. Thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, allows students to systematically identify patterns in qualitative data, aligning with Merleau-Ponty's (1962) Embodied Phenomenology, which stresses the importance of interpreting lived experiences within their full context.

Reflexivity journals, supported by Bourdieu's (1990) Reflexive Sociology, help students recognize and document their biases, assumptions, and evolving interpretations, enhancing the validity of their research. Through these activities, undergraduate students will be able to collect, analyze, and interpret phenomenological data while practicing bracketing and reflexivity.

Graduate-level training should emphasize advanced interpretation, philosophical grounding, and ethical awareness, preparing students for independent phenomenological research. Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills underscores the need for higher-order thinking at this stage, requiring students to engage in evaluation, synthesis, and application. Advanced phenomenological interpretation is a key training activity at this level, as students must critically analyze data using hermeneutic and existential phenomenological frameworks. Heidegger's (2010) Hermeneutic Phenomenology argues that understanding is shaped by historical and cultural contexts, necessitating deep interpretive skills, while Ricoeur's (1981) Narrative Hermeneutics highlights the role of narrative structures in meaning-making. Additionally, cross-cultural applications of phenomenology become crucial, as Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) emphasizes the contextual nature of meaning, requiring researchers to adapt their approaches based on cultural differences. Maturana and Varela's (1987) Theory of Autopoiesis further supports this by suggesting that knowledge is co-constructed through cultural and linguistic frameworks. Ethical dilemmas in qualitative research must also be addressed, with students analyzing case studies on informed consent, confidentiality, and researcher integrity. Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) Ethical Framework for Qualitative Research outlines key ethical concerns, while Foucault's (1977) Power/Knowledge Theory warns that researchers hold power over participants' narratives, necessitating ethical vigilance. At this level, students will be able to apply phenomenological research methods in complex, cross-cultural contexts while maintaining ethical integrity and interpretative depth.

Therefore, developing competent phenomenology researchers requires a progressive and theoretically supported research training approach. Introducing observational inquiry in basic education, strengthening hands-on research skills in undergraduate education, and deepening interpretative and ethical competencies at the graduate level ensures that students are well-prepared for rigorous phenomenological inquiry. By integrating these training activities, students will develop the necessary cognitive, methodological, and ethical competencies to conduct high-quality phenomenological research across various disciplines and cultural contexts.

### **Implications for Research Training in Basic, Undergraduate, and Graduate Education in the Context of the Philippine Education System**

The development of competent phenomenology researchers in the Philippines requires a structured, developmental approach that aligns with the country's educational framework. The Philippine education system follows the K-12 Basic Education Curriculum, which integrates research-related competencies in senior high school, while undergraduate and graduate programs in higher education further strengthen research skills (Department of Education [DepEd], 2013; Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2017). Given the need to enhance research capacity in the country, integrating phenomenological research training at different educational levels can foster critical thinking, methodological rigor, and ethical sensitivity among students and scholars.

At the **basic education level**, particularly in junior and senior high school, students should be introduced to reflective and observational inquiry to build foundational research skills. The K-12 curriculum already includes research subjects, such as *Practical Research 1* and *Practical Research 2*, which encourage students to engage in qualitative and quantitative research methods (DepEd, 2013). Integrating phenomenological approaches at this level can enhance students' ability to describe experiences in-depth, a critical skill for qualitative research. The constructivist learning theory, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, supports the idea that students can learn phenomenological inquiry through scaffolded activities such as guided journaling, storytelling, and ethnographic observation. These activities align with Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of perception, which emphasizes the importance of sensory experience in understanding reality. Additionally, fostering reflexivity through self-narrative exercises, supported by Bruner's (1991) narrative theory, helps students develop interpretative skills early on. By the time they reach senior high school, students will have cultivated a foundation in qualitative observation, self-awareness, and empathy—important precursors to formal phenomenological research.

At the **undergraduate level**, students must transition from exploratory inquiry to structured phenomenological research, focusing on data collection, thematic analysis, and interpretation. The CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 15, series of 2019, mandates research integration in undergraduate programs, emphasizing qualitative research competencies in the social sciences and humanities (CHED, 2019). Training should focus on conducting semi-structured interviews, coding data, and applying thematic analysis, following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006). The person-centered approach (Rogers, 1951) provides theoretical support for qualitative interviewing by emphasizing empathetic engagement with participants. Additionally, Husserl's (1931) transcendental phenomenology, which requires bracketing personal biases, can guide students in practicing epoché through reflexivity journals (Bourdieu, 1990). Thematic analysis, supported by Ricoeur's (1981) hermeneutic phenomenology, helps students understand lived experiences by identifying patterns in narratives. Given that many Filipino students conduct undergraduate theses as part of their academic requirements, incorporating phenomenological research into research methods courses ensures that students develop both practical and theoretical competencies. These experiences equip them with critical thinking skills, a research-oriented mindset, and ethical awareness, aligning with CHED's goal of producing graduates who can contribute to knowledge production and policy development (CHED, 2017).

At the **graduate level**, research training should emphasize advanced phenomenological interpretation, cross-cultural applications, and ethical considerations. Graduate programs in the Philippines, particularly in the social sciences, education, and psychology, require students to engage in rigorous qualitative research (CHED, 2019). Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills highlights that at this level, students should move beyond comprehension and application to evaluation and synthesis. Advanced training should include comparative phenomenological analysis, drawing from Heidegger's (2010) hermeneutic phenomenology, which considers historical and cultural contexts in interpretation. Additionally, cross-cultural phenomenology is particularly relevant in the Philippines, a country with diverse ethnolinguistic groups (Nolasco, 2008). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provides a structured approach for graduate students to analyze phenomenological data while considering cultural influences. Ethical considerations must also be emphasized, following Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) ethical framework for qualitative research. Since Filipino graduate students often conduct research with indigenous communities, urban poor groups, and marginalized sectors, ethical training should include discussions on power dynamics in research, informed consent, and community participation, aligning with Foucault's (1977) power/knowledge theory. Graduate students should be able to apply phenomenological research in complex, real-world contexts while maintaining methodological rigor and ethical integrity.

Hence, enhancing phenomenological research training in the Philippine education system requires a tiered, theory-driven approach. Basic education should focus on observational and reflective inquiry, undergraduate programs should strengthen qualitative research methodologies, and graduate studies should emphasize advanced interpretation and ethical considerations. This progression ensures that students develop the necessary competencies to engage in high-quality phenomenological research that is relevant to the country's socio-cultural landscape. By integrating these training approaches, the Philippine education system can produce researchers equipped to contribute to knowledge generation, policy development, and societal transformation through phenomenological inquiry.

## CONCLUSION

The development of competent phenomenology researchers within the Philippine education system, particularly in a value-oriented educational context, requires a structured, tiered approach that progresses from basic education to graduate-level training. At each educational stage, the emphasis should be placed on building foundational reflective and observational skills, enhancing qualitative research methodologies, and deepening the understanding of advanced phenomenological interpretation, especially in cross-cultural contexts. Integrating phenomenological research into the K-12 curriculum, undergraduate programs, and graduate studies would foster critical thinking, empathy, and reflexivity—qualities that align with the values of respect, compassion, and understanding. Empathy, a central component of phenomenological research, allows students to connect deeply with participants lived experiences, listening attentively to their feelings, meanings, and contextual nuances. This empathetic engagement is essential in honoring the subjective realities of individuals,

which is consistent with value-oriented education teachings on the dignity and value of every person. By embedding empathy within the research process, students are encouraged to approach their work with a heart of service and humility, ensuring that their research respects and integrates diverse cultural perspectives. Through this comprehensive approach, the Philippine education system, particularly in value-oriented institutions, can produce researchers who contribute to meaningful societal transformation by engaging in rigorous, ethical, and culturally relevant phenomenological research that is aligned with both global educational standards and value-oriented principles. This approach not only prepares students to address complex challenges but also nurtures their ability to make a positive impact in diverse educational and cultural settings.

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