



## Exploring human experience through phenomenological research

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 14(01), 1865-1871

Publication history: Received on 22 December 2024; revised on 27 January 2025; accepted on 30 January 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2025.14.1.0319>

### Abstract

A phenomenological investigation, according to Creswell (2007) (p. 57), is described as the "life experience of several individuals on a concept or a phenomenon." Transforming individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence is the aim of the phenomenological method (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). This research paper aims to educate the research fraternity on phenomenological research methodology. Phenomenology is one of the most widely utilized qualitative approaches in PhD Thesis and research studies. A study that applies phenomenological research methodology aims to investigate people's perceptions and comprehension of a specific situation. According to Christensen, Johnstone, and Turner (2010), phenomenological research is distinct from other forms of qualitative inquiry in that it aims to comprehend the essence of a phenomenon from the viewpoint of people who have experienced it. To provide diverse perspectives on the topic under investigation, these investigations require a sufficient number of participants (Moustakas, 1994), for the researcher needs to describe the population of interest providing demographic information about the population to be sampled. Sampling is usually purposive or snowball; the sample size is 8-15, depending on the text referenced.

A phenomenological study revolves around the lived experience of a group of people around a particular phenomenon as the main research issue. Its strong methodological and philosophical foundation makes it applicable to practically every subject.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology; Lived experiences; Qualitative research; Phenomenon; Essence

### 1. Introduction

The phenomenological approach seeks to identify phenomena by showing how humans perceive them in a given circumstance. When applied to the humanities, this typically means obtaining "deep" knowledge and perspectives via inductive, qualitative techniques like participant discussions, deep observations, and interviews, and then summarising them by the analysis of the researcher. Understanding the essence or structure through the lives of participants who experienced what occurred was the goal of a phenomenological study that concentrated on participants' lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Neubauer et al., 2019). In contrast to other forms of qualitative inquiry, phenomenological research aims to comprehend a phenomenon's essence from the viewpoint of those who have experienced it (Christensen et al., 2010).

Phenomenological inquiry examines experiences from the viewpoint of the individual, "bracketing" common assumptions and modes of perception. In Phenomenological research, researchers endeavour to explain people's perceptions or perspectives of any situation. (Cox, M. E. (2021)). Phenomenological methodologies are based on an epistemological paradigm of subjectivity and individual knowledge, highlighting the importance of personal perspective and interpretation.

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Creswell (1998) states that the best indicator of when to use phenomenology is if the research subject demands a thorough understanding of the universal human experience. Phenomenological research places more emphasis on individual experience and perception since it is grounded in a paradigm of subjectivity and personal knowledge. According to Wertz (2007), phenomenology is a low, hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy that gives lived experience, with all of its ambiguity and indeterminacy, preference over the known and revels in the concreteness of person-world associations. "What is it like to have experienced a certain phenomenon?" is the question that phenomenological research studies attempt to answer.

This research aims to show how data collection methods and procedures are organised, analysed, synthesised, and presented in transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology. Therefore, the study's literature review and conceptual framework have not been included. This study's data organisation and analysis was primarily based on Moustakas' and Giorgi's (1985).

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## **2. According to Delve. Ho, L., and Limpaecher, 2017**

### **2.1. Characteristics of phenomenology are**

- Research designs using phenomenology are descriptive. The goal of research is to provide an accurate description of a phenomenon's structure.
- Finding out what a particular experience means to a group of people and how they experienced it is the goal of qualitative phenomenological research design.
- With this method, researchers must put aside their preconceptions and presumptions and concentrate primarily on the present experience.

Exploring the substance of human experiences and comprehending the meaning people attach to them are the main goals of phenomenological study design. It does not impose ideas or explanations; instead, it aims to capture the fundamental elements and underlying structures of these experiences. (Peoples Katarzyna; Sage Publications, Vol 56) Conversely, interpretative phenomenological analysis is a qualitative research methodology based on phenomenology. (Delve. Ho, L & Limpaecher, 2017) By studying how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences within their particular situations, Interpretative Phenomenological seeks to gain a profound understanding of individual experiences. In contrast to conventional phenomenology, Interpretative phenomenology tries to stay close to participant perspectives while acknowledging the importance of the researcher's interpretations. Consequently, interpretative phenomenological analysis adds an interpretive layer that examines participants' sense-making processes within their own experiences. Still, both Basic Phenomenological research and Interpretative Phenomenology focus on exploring human experiences (Delve. Ho, L & Limpaecher, 2017)

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## **3. Classification of Phenomenology**

The two main Theoretical frameworks from which we choose our Research study:

### **3.1. Transcendental or descriptive phenomenology: Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)**

Edmund Husserl is known as the father of phenomenology. His phenomenology is Transcendental, with no use of the theoretical framework and previous assumptions. Nothing should be assumed or taken for granted when understanding a phenomenon.

The father of phenomenology is regarded as Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). His phenomenology is transcendental; it does not make use of prior theories or presumptions. In this phenomenon, one should never make assumptions or take anything for granted. Husserl held that an object's true nature may be found in its perspective. The essential quality of consciousness is intention. It is the knowledge we have about a specific phenomenon. Reduction, which is the conscious awareness of using the bracketing process, is a central idea in this phenomenology (epoche). Reduction, then, is the process of setting aside judgment to focus on the examination of phenomena. Rather than eliminating prejudices, it is delaying them. The experience you are currently having is called Horizon.)It implies that reduction involves putting judgments on hold to concentrate on the study of phenomena. It is putting biases on hold rather than doing away with them. As I write this research paper and live it, Horizon is the experience you are having at this same now. So transcendental Phenomenology is studying the Pure essences of a particular phenomenon in a defined horizon with no biases.

### 3.2. Hermeneutic or Interpretive Phenomenology (Martin Heidegger ( 1889-1976):

Hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of human experience through the lens of the life world or lived human experience. It calls for an explanation or interpretation of the meanings of phenomena encountered by research participants. Husserl, the father of phenomenology, held that the natural sciences' pre-eminence had become separated from the substance and actuality of human experience. All theories and scientific endeavours originate from and are sustained by the neglected foundation of our directly felt and experienced reality. (Page 43, Abram, 1997). Husserl's phenomenology provided a rigorous (descriptive) science for studying lived experience but was also an epistemological and philosophical endeavour (Moran, 2000).

Constructivism, also known as constructivist theory, aided researchers in comprehending how participants disrupted their experiences, how they formed their environment, and the significance of their experiences when it was incorporated into the conceptual framework for qualitative investigations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through description, process awareness, and "collaboration within in a social structure and with its people," qualitative research seeks to produce knowledge (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 4). This type of approach was chosen for this issue because of the richness of data that can be acquired through qualitative research; it allowed for an in-depth inquiry that might yield vast data on a topic that is currently lacking in the literature. (Tiffany Shawna Wiggins, 2017,p.44)

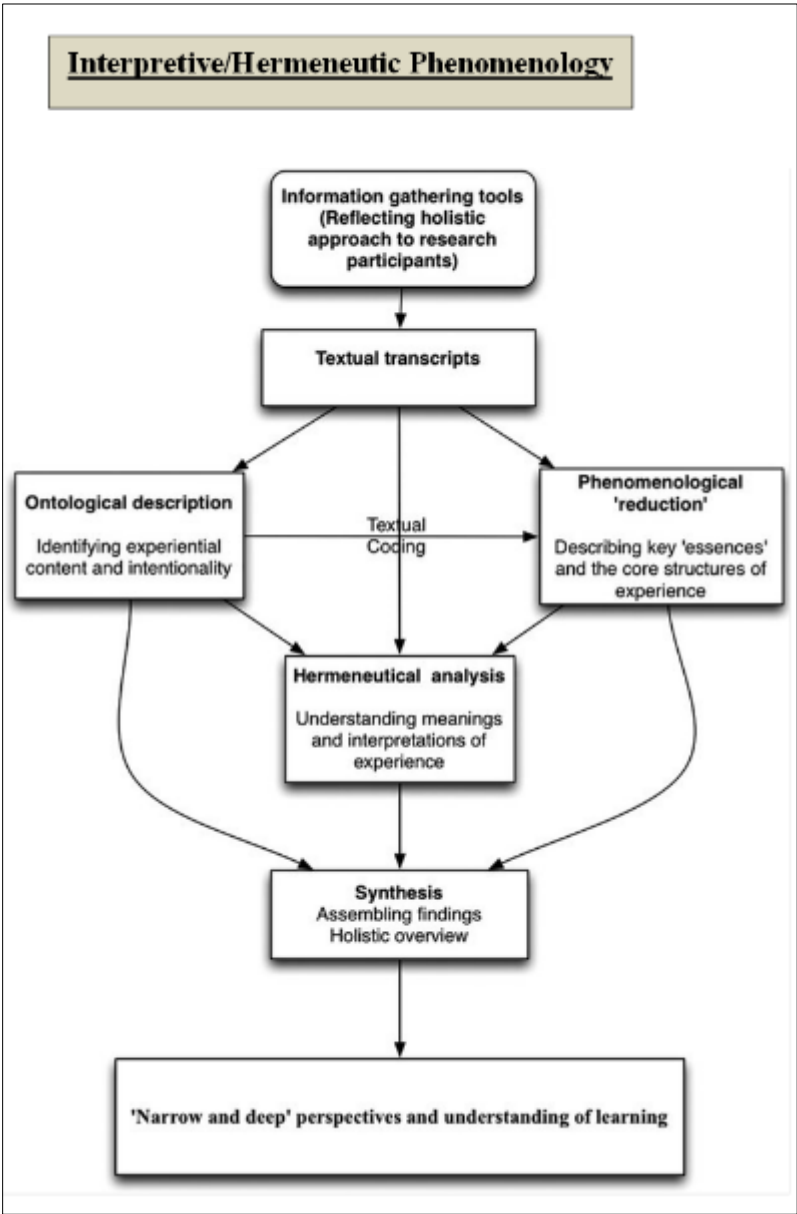
To provide meaning and foster comprehension, the emphasis is on shedding light on small nuances and seemingly insignificant components of experience that we might otherwise take for granted (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991)( Vinay et al., 2017). According to Heidegger, we are never truly apart from others because we are always a part of the world, and to be a part of the world is to be there, or *Dasein*. Heidegger claims that everyone, including me, is *Dasein*. The hermeneutic circle, which is comprehension and interpretation with forethought and prior knowledge, is Heidegger's method for preventing the essence of a phenomenon. He thought that interpretation was always being revised. (Peoples Katarzyna; Sage Publications, Vol 56)

### 3.3. Gadamer's Hermeneutics

According to Gadamer's ontological perspective, scholars act following their cultural traditions since they significantly impact them (Converse, 2012). He emphasises that tradition greatly influences interpretation and that understanding is a state of "being in the world." Gadamer held that while we should always respect the perspectives of others, we also need to be faithful to our own experiences and viewpoints (Gadamer, 1976). One may benefit from acknowledging and utilising one's pre-understandings to comprehend and interpret more fully by employing his central idea of pre-understanding.

Alsaigh, R., & Coyne, I. (2021) outlined a new framework that offers instructions on how to analyse data for a research study while strictly sticking to the core principles and staying true to the primary ideas of Gadamer's work (pre-understandings, the hermeneutic circle, and the fusion of horizons). The framework offers a systematic approach to guarantee rigour while upholding credibility. This could be a helpful reference for novice researchers and students utilising or contemplating Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology in their work.

3.4. Research Methodology in Phenomenology



Source: Edwin Creely (2016):

Figure 1 Interpretive Phenomenology Method

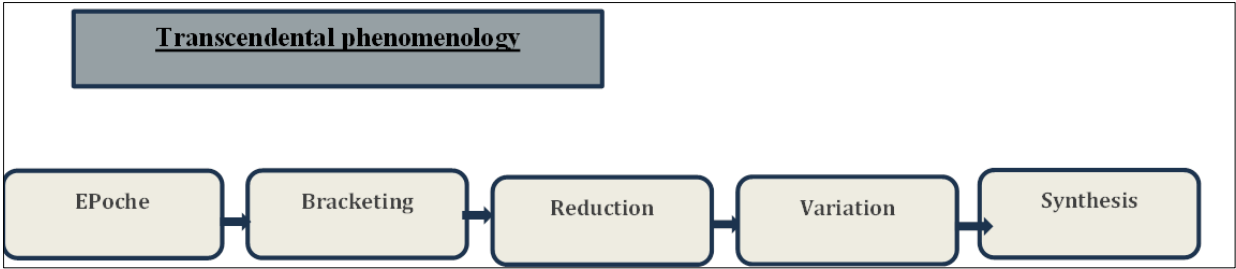


Figure 2 Transcendental Phenomenology Method

- **Sampling:** The ideal sample criteria for phenomenological research is purposeful sampling. Previous research has also indicated that phenomenologists primarily use semi-structured or open-ended interviews. Since gathering data necessitates a thorough examination of human experience, phenomenological samples typically do not include a significant number of individuals. However, these investigations require sufficient participants to provide various perspectives on the topic under investigation (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenologists frequently employ in-depth interviews as a method of accessing the lives of individuals.

### 3.5. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological analysis can be elaborated in the following ways

- The researcher shares his or her own experience with the study subject to ensure that personal biases and judgments do not impede the analytical process.
- The investigator proceeds with the process of "horizontalizing" the data. This is the procedure whereby the researchers compile a list of all the pertinent quotes related to the subject under study and assign each one an equal weight to the group's sentiments. What are the participants saying at this point in the textual description? Which pertinent subjects did the research participants express?
- The investigator organizes pertinent subjects into meaningful units.
- The textual description is written by the researcher, who also uses "ad verbatim" quotations.
- The structural description is written by the researcher.
- In light of the textual and structural analysis, the researcher next moves on to pinpoint the main ideas of the phenomena. Which characteristics are shared by every participant in the research? The textual description is written by the researcher, who also uses "ad verbatim" quotations. (Vinay Chandra Pathak 2017)

### 3.6. Phenomenology and Inclusive Education (One Example)

In Donna Marie Barrow's thesis, she used a phenomenological research design to examine the lived experiences of four mothers of autistic children receiving early intervention services. The parents of young autistic children receiving special education services were the subjects of the study. The purpose of the study was to learn more about early intervention and early childhood special education, as well as the phenomenon of parenting. Donna interviewed each mother to document the lived experiences of all participants. The initial interview was also used by the researcher to establish a rapport and win the participants' trust. To obtain a complete picture of the participants' lived experiences, Barrow conducted a deeper talk with them during the second meeting after going over the notes from the first interview. After analysing the data, Donna determined many key themes that all four mothers had in common. The researcher contextualized the unique experience of parenting children with autism getting early intervention services and a special viewpoint on raising autistic children receiving early intervention programs.

### 3.7. Some Crucial Terminologies in Phenomenological Research

- **Epoche/bracketing:** The researcher consciously discards any common-sense explanations for the phenomenon under investigation, as well as any prior information. This facilitates an open and innocent recording of the participant's account of an experience by the researcher.
- **Fundamental, unchanging structure: Essences:** An explanation of the basic concepts behind the phenomenon under study. Every participant experiences universal phenomena that are included in it. The investigator finds them by examining the interview transcripts, which include the participants' in-depth first-hand accounts of the phenomena.
- **Lifeworld** Husserl, the father of phenomenology, first used the phrase "lifeworld" (German: Lebenswelt) in 1970 to refer to the way we experience the world daily. This would be relevant to the study participants' experiences of daily life in an educational setting that made an effort to meet their unique academic demands.
- **Noesis** Every deliberate experience is made up of a noema and a noesis. The noesis represents the subjective experience of the object, whereas the noema defines the objective experience. For instance, if every research student attended a lecture once a week, the noesis would deal with how various students interpreted and experienced the lecture. At the same time, the noema would represent the "what" of the lecture. It is, therefore, necessary to consider both the noema and the noesis in phenomenological research to comprehend the experiences that the participants have recounted.
- **The Hermeneutic Circle** The continuous, mindful, circular movement between part and whole that occurs as understanding deepens is reflected in the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 1988; Schleiermacher, 1998). The goal is to increase the oneness of the recognised concept in concentric circles. At every point, the standard of accurate comprehension is to balance every detail with the overall picture. (Page 68 of Gadamer, 1998)

#### 4. Discussions

In this research paper, the researcher explains the phenomenological research methodology for students with master's degrees and research scholars in the Indian subcontinent. The researcher has also provided all the essential terminologies for different types of phenomenological research as per the research plan requirements. This Research paper explains the 'How' and 'What' of Phenomenological research. It is exciting that among the various philosophical schools of Heidegger's (1889–1976) heuristic phenomenology, Merleau Ponty's (1908–1961) and Husserl's (1858–1938) transcendental phenomenology all adhere to the four central phenomenological notions of description, its reduction, imaginative variety, and essences, although having distinct philosophical stances (Moustakas, 1994)(Katrina Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). This Philosophical Research approach is a profound idea that conceptualises the nature of the phenomena that any other research fails to get.

#### 5. Conclusion

This research paper used secondary data to understand the qualitative methodology of phenomenology. Phenomenology originates in the academic fields of philosophy and psychology. It is founded on the writings of Edmund Husserl, a philosopher from the 20th century, which Heidegger and Gadamer later expanded upon. Its primary goal is a method within the integration of people's experiences in a particular phenomenon, their perceptions and consciousness. Phenomenology is an incredible method to investigate lived experience, learn more about human thought processes, and broaden a researcher's understanding of a topic, like student behaviour in certain conditions, children with special needs and their problems, and women's experiences with a certain social system.

#### Compliance with ethical standards

##### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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