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Research Article

How Phenomenological are Phenomenology Studies in Educational-Social Sciences: A Sample from TR Dizin*

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research was to examine phenomenological studies in the field of social sciences and educational sciences, published between 2015 and 2023 in the TR Dizin database, in order to evaluate to what extent these studies meet the requirements and characteristics of the phenomenological research. We utilized the descriptive research model to achieve the research purpose in this study. We located 1048 research papers in TR Dizin that used phenomenological model. Then, we employed stratified sampling technique and chose 84 studies as the sample. Moreover, we created the Phenomenological Research Examination Form. The aforementioned form was used by two raters in addition to researchers. Reliability coefficient between four raters was found to be .91. We have found that a significant number of the studies in the sample collected their participants' opinions, perspectives or perceptions. In terms of research questions of studies in the sample, we determined that a significant portion of the questions aimed at describing the consequences of the experience (opinion, perspective, perception, etc.) rather than understanding and making sense of it. The average number of participants in the phenomenological studies we examined was 55. Only a few of the research studies used observation as a data collection technique. We conclude that phenomenological research should be conducted by employing qualitative research understanding instead of quantitative one. Additionally, in phenomenological research, experience should be prioritized and studied instead of studying only opinion, perspective and perception.

Keywords

phenomenology, qualitative research, research methods, TR Dizin

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Introduction

The last quarter of the twentieth century has witnessed a period of paradigm wars in social sciences including educational research (Gage, 1989). Ever since, there have been quite heated discussions on whether quantitative research tradition or newly maturing qualitative research is a more appropriate option to investigate educational and social research questions. Although there is no victorious side in this paradigm war, it is safe to assume that qualitative research has found a place for itself in studies more than it used to in the past periods. In other words, education and social science research frequently employs qualitative research (Çelik et al., 2020). This situation, then, leads to a need for a closer examination of qualitative research studies to ensure that findings of such studies are accurate.

Qualitative research can be conducted by using a dearth of models: (1) ethnography, (2) phenomenology, (3) case study, and (4) grounded theory. Sometimes qualitative researchers add narrative, oral history, action research or biographical-autobiographical research to these models. Despite of these various models, the main purpose in qualitative research is to understand and interpret the actions and behaviors of the people or groups of people. In other words, qualitative research is actually a process of meaning making (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Among the models mentioned, phenomenology is both a qualitative research model and a philosophical method. Although philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Gadamer interpret phenomenology in different ways (Farrell, 2020), phenomenology in the philosophical sense is based on the examination of the structures of consciousness in line with the experiences of the individual (Smith, 2018). As a qualitative research model, on the other hand, phenomenology is based on understanding and interpreting the meaning that individuals and groups attribute to a particular experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin &Lincoln, 2005; Friesen, Henriksson & Saevi, 2012). Looking at the semantic origin of the word, phenomenon is the opposite of noumenon (Türk Dil Kurumu, n.d.). Specifically, noumenon refers to an object in the physical sense whereas phenomenon refers to the experience of the object and the meaning attributed to it. In other words, experience has a central position in phenomenological research. For example, a qualitative researcher interested in investigating what cancer patients experience and what meanings emerge from their experience for them might utilize a phenomenological model to carry her research. Çarpar (2020, pp. 695-696) lists following characteristics of phenomenological research:

- Phenomenological researcher must identify the experience (phenomenon),
- Phenomenological researcher must locate participants who has the experience in regard to phenomenon,
- Phenomenological researcher must employ data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews and participant observation. These techniques must ensure that there exist a close interaction and communication with participants (prolonged engagement),

- Since understanding the experience requires a long process, fieldwork must continue as long as possible and necessary,
- The data analysis process is long and detailed as well,
- The phenomenological researcher should bracket her own views, prejudices and opinions about the experience at least during the data collection process.

An example of a remarkable and instructive phenomenological research is Myerhoff's *Number Our Day*s (1978). In her study, Myerhoff investigated the aging experiences of Jewish immigrants who had to migrate to the United States after the Second World War and live in ghettos with low socio-economic life standards. Within the scope of her research, she conducted in-depth interviews with aging Jews over a period of up to five years, closely observed the Aliyah Senior Citizen Center, where such elderly people often go, and generally integrated with their daily lives. In this way, she examined the phenomenon called aging on Jewish immigrants in as much detail as possible. In another example, Sever and Aypay (2014) investigated the meaning and teaching experiences of teachers practicing their profession in different contexts and conditions in Türkiye. Their phenomenological research aimed at understanding and interpreting teaching experiences of teachers that work at villages, suburbs and cities as well as retired teachers or teachers working in private schools. Additionally, Gelmez Burakgazi et. al. (2023) and Ersoy (2014) provide interesting examples of phenomenological research. In all of these studies, the experience of a group was analyzed and interpreted in depth, the key point in any research that employs phenomenology as the research model.

Phenomenological research is a model that requires a close relationship with the context, and between the researcher and participants (Friesen, Henriksson & Saevi, 2012). Such a requirement necessitates that the phenomenological researcher actively attends and spends a prolonged period of time in the context she examines. Therefore, as with all qualitative research, phenomenological research requires a challenging and arduous process. However, as mentioned before, since qualitative research approach is relatively new compared to quantitative research, it is possible to encounter some difficulties in the design and implementation of such research. On the other hand, the predominance of the quantitative approach in educational and social research (Howe, 2004) might complicate the selection and use of qualitative designs appropriately since educational and social researchers are *au fait* quantitative tradition. In other words, the inappropriate selection and application of qualitative designs may cause problems in terms of research design that might affect the accuracy and coherence of results (Çelik et al., 2020). On the other hand, Tr Dizin is a database that the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) created and maintains. It indexes journals in various fields such as engineering, natural sciences, nursing, social and educational sciences based on some quality criteria. Researchers in Türkiye are tenured based partly on the publications they have in this database. In this milieu, it can

be concluded that there is a need to examine phenomenological research published in TR Dizin to scrutinize to what extent these studies meet the requirements and characteristics of phenomenological model. Consequently, the main purpose of this study is to evaluate phenomenological studies published in the TR Dizin database between 2015 and 2023 in the fields of educational and social sciences to uncover the extent these studies meet the requirements of phenomenological model.

Theoretical Background

Qualitative research is based on the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm has emerged as an objection to the claims of the positivist paradigm such as the quantification of data, the researcher's objectivity, and generalization. As a result, the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative research highlights establishing a deep level of communication instead of quantitative data to understand human beings and evaluating events or people in the context in which they are located. The aforementioned characteristics of qualitative research have led to a more flexible way of conducting research. Naturally, it is troublesome, if not impossible, to determine criteria for evaluation of qualitative studies (Yadav, 2022) as it is a flexible way of carrying out research. In fact, it might not be even meaningful to set criteria and checklists for the quality of qualitative research (Yadav, 2022) since qualitative research itself suggests avoiding standardization. Undoubtedly, this does mean that *qualitativeness* of qualitative research should not or cannot be under scrutiny. By the term qualitativeness, we aim to point to the fact that a qualitative study must be planned qualitatively, conducted qualitatively and reported qualitatively by paying close attention to the theoretical assumptions of the paradigm behind it. In line of this operational explanation, a qualitative study would lack qualitativeness if it claimed to be qualitative research but included strong influences from quantitative research either in planning, conducting and reporting phases of it.

Qualitative researchers have developed various checklists or forms to determine the quality of qualitative research while avoiding extreme standardization. Yadav (2022, p. 685) listed some of such checklists or forms:

- Tong et. al. (2007) developed Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ). This form is widely used to evaluate qualitative studies,
- O'Brien et. al. (2014) created Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) that is used for checking qualitative research in medical education,
- Tracy (2010) & Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) (2021) is a form that can used in evaluating different models of qualitative research,
- Twining et. al. (2017) developed a guideline to conduct and report qualitative research.

As can be seen from forms and checklists we listed, the existing studies are generally aim at examining the quality of a qualitative research without distinguishing between models. Considering the purpose of this study, it can be said that there is a need for a checklist to examine the extent of phenomenological research reports to the requirements and characteristics of the model. The issue of examining a phenomenological study in terms of its appropriateness to the characteristics and requirements of the model can be dealt with by approaching it with reference to two dimensions. Firstly, one can examine the suitability of the study to the theoretical (methodological) background of phenomenology as well as its expectations. Secondly, one can investigate the extent to which the study meets the technical features of the model. Such an endeavor to examine quality of existing phenomenological research with reference to methodological (theoretical) and technical dimensions might contribute to increase the quality of future phenomenological research.

Consequently, in this study, we aim to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do the phenomenological studies published between 2015-2023 in the TR Dizin database in the fields of educational and social sciences carry the requirements of the phenomenological model in terms of methodology?

2. To what extent do the phenomenological studies published between 2015-2023 in the TR Dizin database in the fields of educational and social sciences carry the requirements of the phenomenological model in terms of method?

By methodological dimension, we mean the following points:

- To what extent research purpose of a study is suitable for phenomenological model,

The primary purpose of phenomenological research is to understand and make a meaning of an experience that a group of people has. For this reason, expectedly, phenomenological studies must strive for achieving a purpose that underlines such an experience.

- To what extent research questions of a study is suitable for phenomenological model, Similar to purpose of a phenomenological study, research questions must also be congruent with an experience and its implications for participants.

- To what extent participants of a study is suitable for phenomenological model.

- As is the case in all qualitative models, participants in phenomenological research must the people who can provide an accurate and detailed understanding of the experience. Besides, the aim in phenomenological research is to get a glimpse of participants' realities, then, one is expected to study with a relatively small group of people rather than large groups in phenomenological studies.

- To what extent a study explains the researcher's role.

- Theoretical background of phenomenological research gives the researcher a central role in the research process in that she is the main agent of data collection as well as analysis. For this reason, phenomenological studies must put the researcher in a central role in the design of the study as well as detail this role in the report.
- To what extent a study dwells on its theoretical background to demonstrate that its background is suitable for phenomenological model.
- Phenomenological research differs significantly from other qualitative and quantitative models in terms of its theoretical background and assumptions. Consequently, phenomenological studies should explain how the study at hand reflected assumptions of phenomenological model.
- To what extent a study explains ethical considerations that guided the research process. Since phenomenological research obliges researcher to create rapport with participants of a phenomenological study, it is imperative that a phenomenological researcher develops a set of guidelines to ensure physical and psychological wellness of participants.

By technical dimension, we mean the following points:

- Data collection techniques,Phenomenological model has three main data collection techniques (interview, observation and fieldnotes) as is the case with other models of qualitative tradition. Especially for phenomenological model, the main techniques for data collection are in-depth interviews and observation. Phenomenological research is expected to utilize in-depth interviews and observation to uncover meanings of experiences from the perspective of participants.
- Presentation of findings and use of statistical data (frequencies, percentages, etc.), Qualitative tradition suggests a more flexible presentation of findings. It also cautions against use of percentages and frequencies in line with its interpretivist background.

Method

Research Model

We employed a descriptive research model for this study to examine the studies conducted with phenomenological research design in the field of social sciences and educational sciences between 2015-2023 in the TR Dizin database. Descriptive research provides researchers with a perspective to determine the general distribution and situation by describing the current situation related to the phenomenon of interest (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

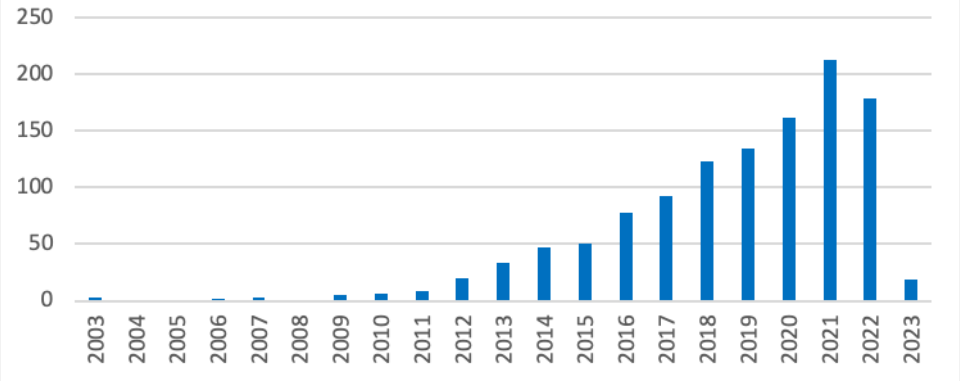
Population & Sample

Research Article

The population of the research includes all qualitative studies in the field of social and educational sciences with a phenomenological design, published between 2015 and 2023 in the TR Dizin. In order to locate the studies in the population, we used "fenomenoloji," "görüngübilim," "olgubilim," "görüngübilimsel," "olgubilimsel," search terms. We aimed to locate all studies that included at least one of these terms in their abstract. We chose 2015 as the starting point because, as of this year, we noticed a significant increase in the number of studies using the phenomenological model compared to previous years (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

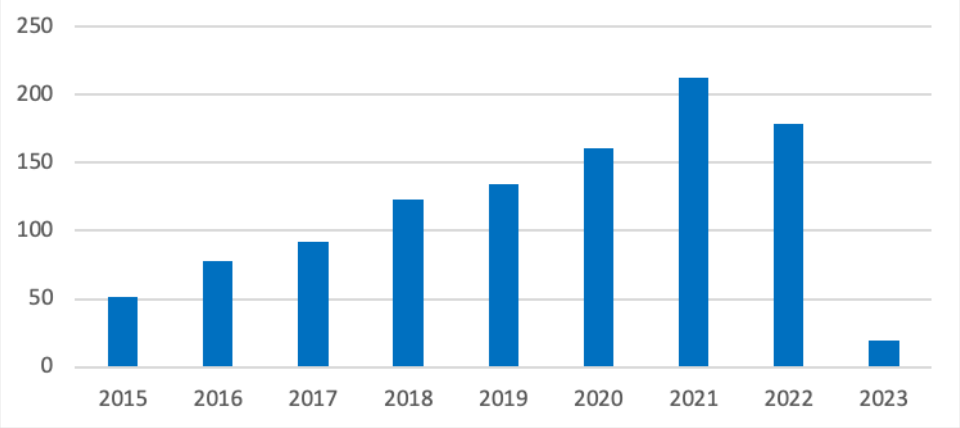
Distribution of Phenomenological Studies According to Publication Year



As can be seen in Figure 1, the first research using the phenomenological model in the field of social sciences in the TR Dizin database was published in 2003. Especially after 2015, there has been a significant increase in the number of studies in which this model has been employed. For this reason, we limited the population between 2015 and 2023. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the number of studies in the research population according to years.

Figure 2

Distribution of Phenomenological Studies in the Research Population by Year



As Figure 2 displays, there were 51 phenomenological studies in 2015, 78 in 2016, 92 in 2017, 123 in 2018, 134 in 2019, 161 in 2020, 212 in 2021, 178 in 2022 and 19 in 2023 at the time writing of this research report. As a result, we located a total of 1048 studies in the population. Considering the large number of studies that make up the population, we utilized stratified random sampling technique to create the study's sample. In order to analyze text-based documents, researchers can divide the documents into strata and randomly select a certain percentage of documents from each stratum due to practical considerations (Benoit, 2011).

In order to create strata, we used number of phenomenological studies in each year of the population range. Therefore, we calculated the number of studies for each year for a total of 1048 research reports. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the studies constituting the population according to years.

Table 1

Number of Publications in the Population by Years

Year	Number of Publications	Percentage (%)
2015	51	4.87
2016	78	7.44
2017	92	8.78
2018	123	11.74
2019	134	12.79
2020	161	15.36
2021	212	20.23
2022	178	16.98
2023	19	1.81
TOTAL	1048	100

For the stratified sampling process, after determining the number of publications in each year, we sampled eight percent of studies from each stratum. We listed all the studies in each strata; after, we used systematic sampling technique where we randomly chose eight percent of studies in each year. As a result of this sampling process, we identified 84 studies with phenomenological design out of 1048 publications. In other words, our sample for this study included a total of 84 phenomenological studies. Table 2 indicates the distribution and percentages of the studies in the sample according to years.

Table 2

Distribution of Publications in the Sample by Year and Their Percentage

Year	Number of Publications	Percentage
2015	4	4.87
2016	6	7.44
2017	7	8.78
2018	10	11.74
2019	11	12.79
2020	13	15.36
2021	17	20.23
2022	14	16.98
2023	2	1.81
TOTAL	84	100

Data Collection Tools

We conducted a literature review on dimensions of phenomenological research by taking into account the basic issues that constitute the essence of the phenomenological model. As a result of this review, we found out that there does not exist a checklist or a form to examine phenomenological studies. However, we located a checklist by Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) that aims to evaluate the quality of qualitative research. We judged that this list is not suitable for our purposes in this study as it does not focus on phenomenological studies. We decided to develop a checklist for this study that would allow us to examine phenomenological research specifically. For this purpose, we examined the theoretical foundations of phenomenological research and the characteristics of phenomenology by reviewing fundamental text on phenomenology (e.g. Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Finlay, 2009; Friesen, Henriksson & Saevi, 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith, 2011; van Manen, 1997). Based on this review, we developed Phenomenological Research Examination Form (see Appendix). We designed the form by including two basic dimensions: methodological (theoretical) and method (technical). In the methodological dimension, we included items that focus on philosophical and theoretical background of the phenomenological research. In this dimension, raters evaluated studies by choosing one of the "Not Suitable," "Partly Suitable," "Moderately Suitable," "Sufficiently Suitable" and "Completely Suitable" options for a total of six items. The method (technical) dimension includes items about technical aspects of phenomenological research such as number of participants, data collection technique (interview, observation and fieldnotes), etc.

We presented the first version of the form to two experts for their opinion. One of the experts is a researcher in Curriculum & Instruction while the other specializes in Guidance and

Psychological Counseling. Both of them have experience in qualitative research. We used experts' opinion to finalize the form. In terms of experts' opinions, the items in the first version included only three-level answers (Suitable, Not Suitable, Not Applicable). By taking into one of the suggestions of the experts, we added extra answers to items and made it a five-level Likert type.

We used intra-class correlation coefficients to determine the reliability of four raters' responses in terms of internal consistency. There are a total of six questions in the methodological dimension, in which the raters evaluated the theoretical dimension of the studies. Table 3 presents inter-rater reliability coefficients.

Table 3

Reliability Coefficients Between Raters

	95% Confidence Level			F Test			
	Intraclass Correlation Coefficients	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	Significance
Item 1	.65	.51	.76	2.83	83	249	.00
Item 2	.57	.40	.70	2.30	83	249	.00
Item 3	.63	.48	.74	2.66	83	249	.00
Item 4	.19	-.13	.44	1.24	83	249	.11
Item 5	.50	.29	.65	1.97	83	249	.00
Item 6	.45	.23	.62	1.81	83	249	.00
	.91	.89	.94	11.70	83	1909	.00

As Table 3 indicates, the overall reliability coefficient between the four raters for the six items was determined to be .91. Since this coefficient was greater than .60, we concluded that inter-rater reliability was achieved (Weir, 2005). Consequently, we present the findings as a result of the analysis of the values obtained from the raters.

Data Anlaysis

Four raters used Phenomenological Research Examination Form to evaluate each of 84 phenomenological study in the sample. Two of the raters are the researchers of this study. The other two raters are researchers specialized in the field of Guidance and Psychological Counselling who have qualitative research experience. Prior to the rating process, we explained to the other raters how they need to use the form as well as conducting exemplificative rating activities (Somer, 2010). During this process, we answered raters' questions to ensure that the rating process happens without a problem that might influence the accuracy of the findings. Four raters evaluated each of 84 phenomenological study in the sample individually and separately. Raters' evaluations were quantified as follows: "Not Suitable=1" "Partly

Suitable=2" "Moderately Suitable=3" "Sufficiently Suitable=4" and "Completely Suitable=5." Since the technical dimension is about non-evaluative items (number of participants, etc.), only we (researchers of this study) filled out this section. We present our findings by using the results of such descriptive statistical techniques as mean, frequency, percent.

Results

Aiming to evaluate phenomenological studies published in the TR DİZİN database between 2015 and 2023 in the fields of educational and social sciences to uncover the extent these studies meet the requirements of phenomenological model; we present our findings in two subheadings that are congruent with data collection tool and questions in it.

Findings Related to Methodological (Theoretical) Dimension

Table 4 lists raters' evaluations in regard to the first item in the form (How suitable is the purpose of the research to a phenomenological study?).

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations Regarding the Suitableness of the Purposes of the Studies to the Phenomenological Model

	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
Rater 1	1.55	.95
Rater 2	2.20	1.20
Rater 3	3.61	1.10
Rater 4	1.77	1.20
AVERAGE	2.28	.77

In terms of raters' evaluations regarding the purposes of the studies in the sample, we determined that the mean of Rater 1's points was 1.55 (SD=.95), Rater 2's was 2.20 (SD=1.20), Rater 3's was 3.61 (SD=1.10), Rater 4's was 1.77 (SD=1.20) and the mean of all raters' was 2.28 (SD=.77). To put these numbers into perspective and make them more meaningful, we analyzed purposes of research reports in the sample. As a result of this analysis, we list here some of the purposes in the sample (Although we translate the actual purposes from the studies in our sample directly, we do not cite them and omit some key terminology in them to protect anonymity of researchers and to avoid *ad hominem* argumentations. All emphasis in examples is ours):

- "The aim of this study is to determine the opinions of prospective … teachers about Turkey's …."
- "The aim of this study is to determine teachers' views on …"

- "In this study, which is based on the phenomenology design from qualitative research, it was tried to obtain the views of pre-service teachers on the phenomenon of '…'"
- "The aim of this research is to collect information about how … students … define … through metaphors."
- "The aim of this study is to examine the perceptions of … about … through metaphors."

Now, let us mention purpose statements from some other phenomenological research (Again, we do not cite the reports and omit some key terminology in them to protect anonymity of researchers and to avoid *ad hominem* argumentations. All emphasis in examples is ours):

- "This purpose of the study was (a) to identify gaps in the existing knowledge regarding impacts of …, (b) to gain an understanding of the lived experience of …, and (c) to identify implications for research and practice."
- "This study investigated the unique experiences of parents with a very young with …"
- "The results of this study provided insight into contextual influences on … and the meaning … make of their experience in that context."

It seems clear that the phenomenology research in the sample simply collects participants views, opinions, perspectives and perceptions about an experience rather than trying to uncover what the experience means for participants through interpretation. Or, the studies in the sample utilize metaphors and name the study as phenomenology. Table 5 includes the findings regarding the second item in the data collection form (How suitable are the research questions to the phenomenological method?).

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations Regarding the Suitableness of the Research Questions of the Studies to the Phenomenological Model

	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
Rater 1	1.48	.84
Rater 2	1.69	.85
Rater 3	3.58	1.33
Rater 4	1.52	.92
AVERAGE	2.07	.63

In terms of raters' evaluations regarding the research questions of the studies in the sample, we found out that the mean of Rater 1's points was 1.48 (SD=.84), Rater 2's was 1.69 (SD=.85), Rater 3's was 3.58 (SD=1.33), Rater 4's was 1.52 (SD=.92) and the mean of all raters' was 2.07

(SD=.63). Similar to purposes, we analyzed research questions of the studies in the sample. As a result of this analysis, we list here some of the questions in the sample (Although we translate the actual research questions from the studies in our sample directly, we do not cite them and omit some key terminology in them to protect anonymity of researchers and to avoid *ad hominem* argumentations. All emphasis in examples is ours):

- "What are the opinions of pre-service teachers about … with an …?"
- "What are the expectations of … from … about … in education?"
- "In the … document, what are the positive and negative aspects of the practices to be carried out under the title of …?"
- "What are the opinions and experiences of pre-service … teachers about using … in … courses?"
- "- What do you understand from the term … ?

  - What characteristics do … people have?

  - Do you see yourself as …?"

  (In this specific example, researchers list interview questions instead of research questions).

A close look to these questions attests that the studies in our sample strived for answering research questions that were formed as a result of quantitative understanding. Including phenomenology, qualitative research models generally deal with what, how and why type of questions for they aim to gather a deeper understanding of the construct they investigate. As was the case with purposes of the studies, research questions focus only on views, opinions, perspectives and perceptions. Table 6 presents the findings regarding the third item in the data collection form (How suitable are the participants for this study in terms of the experience that is being studied in the research?).

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations Regarding the Suitableness of the Participants of the Studies to the Phenomenological Model

	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
Rater 1	2.36	.97
Rater 2	2.50	1.38
Rater 3	3.67	1.05
Rater 4	1.83	1.29
AVERAGE	2.59	.82

In terms of raters' evaluations regarding the participants of the studies in the sample, we ascertained that the mean of Rater 1's points was 2.36 (SD=.97), Rater 2's was 2.50 (SD=1.38), Rater 3's was 3.67 (SD=1.05), Rater 4's was 1.83 (SD=1.29) and the mean of all raters' was 2.59 (SD=.82). In terms of participants of the studies, we found that studies usually reach to somewhat suitable groups of people about the experience under investigation. However, the issue we mentioned about purposes and research questions might hinder suitability of participants in that if a study was not designed qualitatively, participants' relation to the experience might only be secondary in terms of study's accuracy. Another issue in terms of participants is establishing rapport with them as a result of researcher's prolonged engagement with the participants in the context of the experience. Table 7 lists the findings related to the fourth item in the data collection form (How suitable is the researcher's effort to explain her own role in the study to the phenomenological model?)

Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations Regarding the Suitableness of the Researcher's Effort to Explain Her Role to the Phenomenological Model

	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
Rater 1	1.46	.67
Rater 2	1.98	.86
Rater 3	3.58	.99
Rater 4	1.06	1.39
AVERAGE	2.02	.41

In terms of raters' evaluations regarding the explanation of research's role in the sample, we found that the mean of Rater 1's points was 1.46 (SD=.67), Rater 2's was 1.98 (SD=.86), Rater 3's was 3.58 (SD=.99), Rater 4's was 1.06 (SD=1.39) and the mean of all raters' was 2.02 (SD=.41). We did not observe any study in the sample that explained significantly how the researcher(s) positioned themselves in the design of their research. Even when they mentioned how the data collection process was carried out, they prefer a passive tone that hint to a separation from the data collection and analysis. For example (Although we quote parts here from the studies in our sample directly, we do not cite them and omit some key terminology in them to protect anonymity of researchers and to avoid *ad hominem* argumentations. All emphasis in examples is ours):

- "Before the interview questions were prepared, a literature review on the research topic was conducted. After the literature review, the questions to be included in the interview form were determined … In addition, the interview form was finalized by taking into account the suggestions on issues such as clarity, comprehensibility, inclusiveness and suitability for the purpose."

- "The research data were collected through in-depth interviews between … and lasted … months in total. Interviews lasted between … minutes and all interviews were

conducted face-to-face and recorded with a tape recorder. Before starting the interviews, the participants were informed about the study and written permission was obtained from them to use their statements in the study."

- "The sample of the research consists of a total of 263 people who graduated from this program in the mentioned period and who correctly participated in the questionnaire form as current students."

(In this example, researchers used a questionnaire that they distributed to 263 participants to collect data and claim to design the study as phenomenology).

Table 8 shows the findings related to the fifth item in the data collection form (How suitable is the explanation of the theoretical basis of the phenomenological method in the study?).

Table 8

Means and Standard Deviations Regarding the Suitableness of the Explanation of Theoretical Basis to the Phenomenological Model

	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
Rater 1	2.07	.76
Rater 2	2.00	.86
Rater 3	3.64	.86
Rater 4	1.42	.81
AVERAGE	2.28	.52

In terms of raters' evaluations regarding the explanation of research's role in the sample, we found that the mean of Rater 1's points was 2.07 (SD=.76), Rater 2's was 2.00 (SD=.86), Rater 3's was 3.64 (SD=.86), Rater 4's was 1.42 (SD=.81) and the mean of all raters' was 2.28 (SD=.52). We determined that the researchers only gave a definition of phenomenology in terms of explaining the theoretical background of their study. An overwhelmingly significant number of studies in the sample defined phenomenology by citing Yıldırım & Şimşek (2013, p. 78): "Phenomenology focuses on phenomena that we are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding of." The definition they cited was the mostly what they wrote about theoretical background of the study. What is more, in terms of design (a direct consequence of theoretical background of the model, we postulate), some studies included design choices that do not resemble qualitative research tradition in any way, yet alone phenomenology. For instance (Although we quote parts here from the studies in our sample directly, we do not cite them and omit some key terminology in them to protect anonymity of researchers and to avoid *ad hominem* argumentations. All emphasis in examples is ours):

- "In order to understand the reflections of …, which was supported by an interdisciplinary approach as an …, on the behaviors of pre-service teachers, structured writ-

ten interview questions related to three basic dimensions within the framework of … were applied as pre and post-test. The data obtained were quantified and evaluated, …"

- What is the distribution of the themes in the drawings of … students about '…' according to gender variable?
- "In this study, it was tried to obtain detailed data on how … in … is realized, what are its effects, which variables are affected by it and what can be done for … ."

Table 9 includes the findings related to the sixth item in the data collection form (How suitable is the explanation of the ethical issues required by the phenomenological method in the study?).

Table 9

Means and Standard Deviations Regarding the Suitableness of the Explanation of Ethical Issues to the Phenomenological Model

	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
Rater 1	1.29	.53
Rater 2	1.75	.62
Rater 3	3.18	.75
Rater 4	1.24	.67
AVERAGE	1.86	.40

In terms of raters' evaluations regarding the explanation of ethical issues, we determined that the mean of Rater 1's points was 1.29 (SD=.53), Rater 2's was 1.75 (SD=.62), Rater 3's was 3.18 (SD=.75), Rater 4's was 1.24 (SD=.67) and the mean of all raters' was 1.86 (SD=.40). Through a prolonged engagement with the dataset, it is our understanding that the studies in the sample consider ethical issues only in terms of getting approval from ethical board of the university that they are affiliated with. We now present some explanations from the studies in the sample in regard to ethics (Although we quote parts here from the studies in our sample directly, we do not cite them and omit some key terminology in them to protect anonymity of researchers and to avoid *ad hominem* argumentations. All emphasis in examples is ours):

- "After determining the study group, the necessary permissions were obtained from … Committee with the Ethics Committee decision dated … and numbered …"
- "Prior to data collection, the necessary ethical permission for the research was obtained from … Ethics Committee with the decision dated … and numbered …"
- "The ethics committee permission of the study was obtained from … Ethics Committee on … with the number …"

Findings Related to Method (Technical) Dimension

We present our findings related to technical dimension of phenomenological studies in this section. First and foremost, we calculated that the average number of participants in the studies we examined was 55 where minimum number of participants was 5 and maximum number of participants was 270. Table 10 shows finding about data collection techniques in the studies.

Table 10

Numbers and Percentages about Data Collection Techniques

	Yes (%)	No (%)	TOTAL
Interview	56 (66.7)	28 (33.3)	84
	Structured	*Semi-structured*	
Type of interview	2 (3.57)	54 (96.43)	56
Observation	2 (2.4)	82 (97.62)	84
Type of observation	Participant	Non-participant	2
	1	1	

Table 10 indicates that 56 (66.7%) of the studies in the sample utilized interview as a data collection technique, while in 28 (33.3%) of them did not use it. In addition, 54 (96.43%) of the total 56 studies employed semi-structured interview technique, while only two studies utilized structured one. On the other hand, quite interestingly, only two of the 84 studies (2.4%) benefited from observation as a data collection technique whereas 82 (97.62%) studies did not utilize observation. In one of the two studies in which observation technique was used, its type was participant observation while the other one was non-participant. Table 11 summarizes findings about writing of the findings in the studies of the sample and the use of frequencies in them.

Table 11

Percentages about Writing of Findings and Use of Frequencies

	f	Percentage (%)
Presentation of Findings		
Interpretive	13	15.5
Descriptive	71	84.5
Use of Frequencies		
Yes	56	66.7
No	28	33.3

As Table 11 illustrates, 13 (15.5%) of the 84 studies present their findings interpretatively while 71 (84.5%) studies present their findings descriptively. Similarly, 56 studies (66.7%) employed frequencies, while 28 studies (33.3%) did not include them. In next section, we provide a discussion of our findings.

Discussion

The raters evaluated the appropriateness of the purposes of the studies in the sample to phenomenological research as partially suitable. The reason behind this finding might be because of the fact that these studies might be missing the crucial link between a phenomenological understanding behind phenomenological research. It might be due to this missing link that we determined the majority of studies in our sample usually investigate their participants' views (opinion), specify their points of perspective (point of view) or examine their perceptions. Although views, perspectives and perceptions are vital concepts to investigate in any social and educational research, it is incorrect to simply gather data on participants' views, perspectives and perceptions in a phenomenological study. As phenomenological research, first and foremost, aims at making meaning of an experience from the perspective of participants as understood and interpreted by the researcher, the experience and the experience alone should be at the center of any phenomenological research (Burch, 1990; Mapp, 2008). The opponents of this idea might argue that participants' views, perspectives and perceptions are direct results of their experience. For this reason, any phenomenology study that identifies views, perspectives and perceptions of participants in fact examines the experience. We attest that there might some to truth to this claim; we still contend that a phenomenological study is obliged to focus on an experience in the context that it happens to interpret how participants make meaning of it rather than possible consequences of it such as views, perspectives and perceptions. It is for this reason that we assert phenomenological research that only collects data about views, perspectives and perceptions and then quantify them simply misses the point of phenomenological research. Similarly, we ascertained that some of the studies in our sample utilizes metaphors to reveal people's perceptions about a concept or phenomenon. While we wholeheartedly believe that metaphor studies are valuable in uncovering meanings that participants attribute to a concept; metaphors reflect only one aspect of phenomenological research's goal of understanding and describing experience at a deeper level. Thus, studies that only use metaphors to collect data should not claim to be phenomenology.

The raters evaluated the appropriateness of the research question of the studies in the sample to phenomenological research as partially suitable. As the logic of scientific research dictates, it is imperative that questions in any research is congruent with the research model. As we already discussed, phenomenological research necessitates understanding and interpreting an experience. Therefore, in light of congruency premise between the method and research questions, it is only logical to conclude that research questions in a phenomenological study must be in agreement with the paradigm behind phenomenology. However, findings in this

study indicate that research questions of phenomenological studies in the sample strive to describe results of an experience such as view, perspective or perception quantitively instead of understanding and interpreting it qualitatively. The underlying cause of this situation, we maintain, is that phenomenological studies we investigated were carried out with a quantitative mindset rather than a qualitative one. For example, we found out that some of studies in the sample discusses how findings change in relation to the gender, how one variable affects the other, which variables influence a phenomenon and how one phenomenon changes over time by using a pre-test and post-test design. The aforementioned design choices point out to quantitative research understanding. We put forward that it should be obvious that the use of quantitative understanding and techniques in qualitative phenomenological research would naturally influence the nature of findings even though the research claims to be a phenomenology. In this milieu, we claim that any phenomenological study must be designed phenomenologically, carried out phenomenologically and reported phenomenologically. This point, we believe, should be the case for other models of qualitative research as well.

The raters evaluated the appropriateness of the participants of the studies in the sample to phenomenological research as moderately suitable. The necessity of having an experience as the focal point of research in phenomenological studies to understand and interpret it requires the researcher to reach to participants that have had the experience in the context that it occurred. It, moreover, entails a prolonged engagement with them. It is only thorough locating such participants and establishing rapport with them that a phenomenological researcher would be able to understand what these participants make of the experience under the investigation. Although we discovered that the raters' evaluation of participant selection is moderate in our sample, we are concerned that participant selection might have little effect on the qualitativeness of the studies as they only focus on views, perspective and perception, and as researchers seldomly, if ever, in our sample explained how they established rapport with the participants due to prolonged engagement.

The raters evaluated the appropriateness of the effort to explain researcher's role in the sample to phenomenological research as partially suitable. The researcher is an integral and inseparable part of data collection and analysis in qualitative research including phenomenology (Sutton & Austin, 2015). In this respect, in phenomenological research, it is of great importance for the researcher to explain how and why she got interested in the phenomenon of interest, how and how intensively she participated in the research process, and how she collected data and analyzed it. Within the scope of our findings, we claim that the way the researchers explain their roles as if they conducted quantitative research for they prefer a tone of writing that pays special attention to demonstrate that the researchers isolated and separated themselves from data collection and analysis, a caveat that quantitative research approach suggests strongly. Besides, we located studies in the sample that utilized a questionnaire to large group of participants (e.g. 263, 255 etc.) in a phenomenological study.

The raters evaluated the appropriateness of the explanation of theoretical background of studies in the sample to phenomenological research as partially suitable. We are of the opinion that it increases the strength of a research to clearly indicate how the theoretical basis of the method guided planning, conducting and reporting the study. Yet, in our sample, we observed that the researchers limited their explanation of how the theoretical background of phenomenology guided the way they conducted and reported the study to only giving a definition of phenomenology. They almost identically defined phenomenology as "focusing on phenomena that we are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding of," a definition by Yıldırım & Şimşek (2013, p. 78). While we agree that it is important to define the phenomenological method in the research report, we additionally think that it is also important to explain how the theoretical understanding of the method forms the basis for the steps taken in the research process.

The raters evaluated the appropriateness of the explanation of ethical issues to phenomenological research as partially suitable. We ascertained that the phenomenological studies in our sample reduce ethical issues to obtaining ethic committee approval. In research that collects data from humans, it is necessary to obtain permission from the relevant ethical board of the higher education institution that the researchers are affiliated with. However, in phenomenological research that requires close contact with participants, it is important to address issues such as participant privacy, health, data storage, etc. in detail beyond ethics committee permission, and to explain how these issues are dealt with in the research.

In phenomenological research, it is essential to investigate the experience under consideration with relatively smaller group of participants in accordance with qualitative research approach since phenomenological research aims to understand the experience more deeply in context. The aim of understanding experience deeply in the context can only be achieved with smaller groups rather than larger ones. Besides, phenomenological research does not necessitate large group of participants since it strives for not generalization but understanding particularity. We calculated that the average number of participants in the studies we investigated was 55. We convey that it is extremely hard, if not impossible, to understand and interpret an experience from the perspective of people with these many people. Consequently, we purport that some of the studies in the sample that were conducted with participant groups of 263, 262, 250, 234 people would be better if designed as survey research (with the usage of a reliable questionnaire) rather than phenomenology.

Interview is naturally the main technique of data collection in phenomenological research. Therefore, we consider that it is valuable that the studies in our sample mainly utilize interviews (semi-structured) as the data collection technique. However, we think that the problem with interviews in the studies we evaluated is not whether they were utilized or not; rather it was the quality of the them. It may be due to the fact that these studies generally aim to collect views, perspectives and perceptions rather than to make meaning of an experience that interviews in these studies lack qualitativeness. In other words, interviews in our sample have quantitative characteristic instead of qualitative one. Along with interviewing,

observation also stands as one of the techniques that should be utilized frequently in phenomenological research. However, we observed that almost none of the studies in the sample used observation as a data collection technique.

We determined that the studies mainly present their findings descriptively. By this, we mean that these studies quantified their findings via frequencies and list them in a table, after which they commented on it. Such is a practice that almost identically resembles quantitative research writing. The use of numerical values and techniques such as frequencies, percentages and means to present findings of a qualitative study has always been a controversial issue (Hannah & Lautsch, 2011). The use of basic statistics in qualitative research serves a political purpose in that researchers might be tended to use statistical values in qualitative studies since without such values qualitative research is not considered scientific, and their inclusion in qualitative research might be an attempt to prove that qualitative research is in fact scientific, argues Maxwell (2010). About this issue, we contend that qualitative research is based on the interpretivist paradigm; consequently, it is a natural for the qualitative researcher to be an integral part of the process in data collection, analysis and presentation. We admit that there might be some instances and research context where statistical values might be beneficial to answer questions in a qualitative study. Nevertheless, in the context of the studies we analyzed, we think that was not the case. We accept the exceptions of use of statistical data in qualitative writing; nonetheless, we still hold that the unjustified inclusion of numerical values in qualitative research, i.e., quantifying findings in qualitative research papers with a quantitative understanding, is incompatible with the essence of qualitative research. The fact that numerical values such as frequencies were presented and explained in the studies we evaluated might be another indicator that within context of this study qualitative research was conducted using quantitative logic.

Conclusion

This study identified phenomenological studies between 2015-2023 in the TR Dizin database by creating a sample of 84 studies out of 1048. We accept that a larger sample might provide more reliable results. Similarly, including more raters than we did might also increase the reliability and validity of the findings. As this study focused on only phenomenology as a qualitative research model, we suggest that similar studies for other qualitative research models might be utterly helpful, especially those that would compare and contrast qualitativeness of different qualitative models.

The sample we evaluated mainly employed quantitative research understanding while trying to carry out phenomenological research. In addition, these studies describe the views, perspectives and perceptions of the people instead of studying the experience to reach deeper meanings, which is an integral part of phenomenology. On the other hand, we observed that the sample included relatively large participants, which is not in line

with the nature of phenomenology, and that essential data collection techniques such as observation were employed in very few studies. Therefore, we assert that these conditions we mentioned prevent making sense of experience at a deeper level, a condition that is essential in phenomenology. We conclude this study by maintaining that *qualitativeness* must be watchword of phenomenological research.

We list following suggestions as a result of this study:

- Since qualitative research is an approach with its own paradigm and logic, phenomenological researchers should conduct phenomenological research by employing qualitative logic instead of quantitative one,
- Phenomenological research should prioritize experience instead of only gathering opinion, perspective and perception,
- The interviews in phenomenological research should be in-depth and in a way that can reveal the underlying meanings,
- Phenomenological research, should include smaller groups of participants in the context of experience.

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Appendix
Phenomenological Research Examination Form

Methodological (Theoretical) Dimension	**NS**	**PS**	**MS**	**SS**	**CS**
How suitable is the purpose of the research to a phenomenological study?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
How suitable are the research questions to the phenomenological method?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
How suitable are the participants for this study in terms of the experience that is being studied in the research?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
How suitable is the researcher's effort to explain her role in the study to the phenomenological model?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
How suitable is the explanation of the theoretical basis of the phenomenological method in the study?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
How suitable is the explanation of the ethical issues required by the phenomenological method in the study?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	NS= Not Suitable, PS= Partially Suitable, MS=Moderately Suitable, SS=Sufficiently Suitable, CS=Completely Suitable.				

Technical Dimension			
How many participants are there in the study?			
Is interview used as a data collection tool?	Yes • Structured, • Semi-structured, • Unstructured. AND • Vis-à-vis, • Online, • Printed forms.	No	The study claims to use interview but what is done is not qualitative interview.
Is observation used as a data collection tool?	Yes • Participant, • Non-participant.	No	The study claims to use observation but what is done is not qualitative observation.
Are the findings presented descriptively or interpretively?	Descriptive		Interpretive
Are frequencies (or other descriptive statistics) used in presentation of findings?	Yes		No