

Examining the Role of AI in Qualitative Research: Insights from Document Analysis of Daisaku Ikeda's Peace Proposal

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To cite this article

Kuo, N. C. (2025). Examining the role of ai in qualitative research: insights from document analysis of Daisaku Ikeda's peace proposal. *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: Theory & Practice*, 3(2), 168-183. <https://doi.org/10.59455/qietp.55>

Article Info: Received: 02.12.2025

Revised: 20.12.2025

Accepted: 25.12.2025

Abstract

Purpose: The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has further complicated the debate surrounding software in qualitative data analysis. Misusing AI diminishes researchers' analytical skills and distances them from meaningful engagement with data, promoting the acceptance of merely "good-enough" AI-generated outcomes (Duke, 2025). This study examines these concerns by analyzing Daisaku Ikeda's 2020 peace proposal to illustrate how such challenges manifest in actual research practice.

Method: Before using AI tools, the research team independently analyzed Ikeda's peace proposal and answered the prompts separately. Afterward, the researchers exchanged and reviewed each other's responses and synthesized them into a single paragraph for each prompt, ensuring that each paragraph reflected the depth of Ikeda's messages. The human systematic meaning-making responses were then compared with AI-generated responses.

Findings: Findings indicate that, irrespective of retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) techniques, both standard and enhanced AI systems produce hallucinations and formulaic responses that lack nuance, context, and human emotion. The article concludes that while the efficiency of AI tools is appealing, researchers should always ponder the question: "What is the purpose of conducting qualitative research?"

Implication(s): Ultimately, research is not about presenting isolated pieces of information that can be easily generated by AI but about impacting lives through the depth of understanding.

Keywords

qualitative research, document analysis, artificial intelligence (AI), Daisaku Ikeda

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly used in data analysis, raising important questions about its role in qualitative research. Software applications like ATLAS.ti, NVivo, and MAXQDA have been widely used in qualitative research for decades. However, these tools are not without criticism. The integration of generative AI adds complexity to the ongoing debate about using software for qualitative data analysis, as such technology is now being incorporated into these applications and is accessible beyond their traditional boundaries (Paulus & Marone, 2025). Although AI technology has existed since the 1950s, the rise of generative AI by OpenAI in 2022 has significantly affected various aspects of education, including qualitative research.

As AI technology becomes more widely available, it is essential to examine its use in qualitative research. Duke (2025) argues that the uncritical use of AI technology deskills analytical practices and alienates individuals from engaging with data, leading them to settle for “good-enough” outcomes produced by AI. In a developing field like Ikeda/Soka Studies, both novice and experienced researchers can misuse these tools if they do not understand the nature of various AI models or lack a solid foundation in Ikeda/Soka Studies. Misuses of AI in document analysis are detrimental because they produce misleading, shallow knowledge in the field. Exploring AI in qualitative data analysis early can help ensure the integrity of qualitative research while recognizing the usefulness and need for continuous improvement in AI technology. Given the rapid development of AI and the fact that many novice researchers in the emerging field of Ikeda/Soka Studies still lack the skills to evaluate the validity of AI-generated responses and analyses, it is essential to critically examine AI’s impact.

In his article, “Daisaku Ikeda on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Existential Happiness: Intuition, the Poetic Mind, and Human Education at the Posthuman Turn,” Goulah (2024a) raises a concern, called “the pathology of the absence of human beings,” pervasive in society due to the rapid development of technology. However, this concern may have a limited impact when competing with seemingly efficient AI technology unless more concrete examples are provided in this area. Such examples would serve as a wake-up call to action for researchers and educators, particularly in qualitative data analysis, encouraging them to address the four discursive dilemmas discussed by Paulus and Marone (2025): (a) automated insight-generation versus systematic meaning-making, (b) chatting with documents versus analyzing data, (c) high speed versus high engagement, and (d) novelty versus agency.

This study aims to raise awareness of the complexities AI introduces to qualitative research. It seeks to address the following research questions: 1) In what context is generative AI technology appropriate to use in Ikeda/Soka studies, and 2) what are the incompatible epistemological foundations of qualitative research in Ikeda/Soka studies that AI technology cannot replace? While the findings may seem particularly informative in the field of Ikeda/Soka studies, their implications and applications extend to other fields of qualitative research that employ document analysis as a method in the age of AI. The following sections provide an overview of Daisaku Ikeda, his peace proposals to the United Nations, document analysis, and AI and its applications in qualitative research.

Daisaku Ikeda and His Peace Proposals to the United Nations

Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023) was a philosopher, peacebuilder, educator, author, and poet committed to creating a lasting culture of peace through dialogue. He had engaged in over 7,000 dialogues with global leaders and scholars, addressing a range of pressing global issues (World Tribune, 2024a, 2024b). As the founding president of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), Ikeda established six global institutions to promote peace, culture, and education. He also founded fourteen Soka schools worldwide, from kindergarten to university, to foster an ethos of global citizenship. By 2025, Ikeda had received honorary citizenship from more than 800 cities worldwide and over 400 honorary doctorates (Ikeda, 2025a). Presentations, publications, and applications of Ikeda's philosophy are increasingly featured on national and international conferences, journals, and books, emphasizing the importance of human education in fostering "life-to-life encouragement, creative coexistence, dialogue, global consciousness, and value-creating approaches to knowledge, society, and power" (Goulah, 2024b, p. 1511).

Between 1983 and 2022, Ikeda published 40 annual peace proposals addressing a wide range of global challenges to promote a culture of peace and human security. His proposals address topics including dialogue, youth participation, gender equality, human rights, humanitarian relief, education for global citizenship, sustainability, war, nuclear abolition, and climate change. These works have been translated into at least 52 languages (Ikeda, 2025b). In his final peace proposal before his passing, Ikeda (2022) wrote: "Human beings inherently possess the strength to overcome any challenge. When youth stand up in solidarity, confident that they can determine the future, this fresh awareness and momentum will surely become the driving force toward a brighter future" (p. 18). In this last proposal to the United Nations, he emphasized climate change, youth education, and nuclear abolition as the top three issues. All of Ikeda's peace proposals translated into English are available at <https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/works/props/>.

Document Analysis

Document analysis refers to the systematic, rigorous, and transparent evaluation of documents, both printed and electronic, for content analysis and meaning making (Bowen, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Wood et al., 2020). This method can be applied to both quantitative and qualitative research. In quantitative studies, document analysis is often utilized for content analysis to identify the frequency or pattern of specific information. In contrast, qualitative studies focus on interpretation and the construction of meaning (Morgan, 2022). When the documents used as data are original, credible, and publicly accessible—such as Daisaku Ikeda's peace proposals to the United Nations—this transparency enables others to replicate the study, assess the trustworthiness of the findings, and broaden the scope of future research. Typically, there are three stages of document analysis: *skimming* (superficial examination), *reading* (thorough examination), and *interpretation* through content analysis and thematic analysis. He highlights several advantages of document analysis, including its efficiency, availability, cost-effectiveness, lack of intrusiveness and reactivity, stability, precision, and broad coverage. However, limitations may arise depending on the nature of the documents, including insufficient detail, low retrievability, and biased selection. In a nutshell, he states:

Document analysis...is not a matter of lining up a series of excerpts from printed material to convey whatever idea comes to the researcher's mind. Rather, it is a process of valuating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced and understanding is developed. In the process, the researcher should strive for objectivity and sensitivity and maintain a balance between both.

(Bowen, 2009, pp. 33-34)

Wood et al., (2020) argue that document analysis “demonstrates the value of a framework in sensitising the researcher to the different ways in which documents may be approached, and highlights some of the implications that may have for data collection and analysis...to offer some practical guidance on the application of a thematic analysis process in qualitative data analysis” (p. 467). Thematic analysis is “not a theoretically driven approach, and it does not prescribe epistemological or ontological frameworks” (Morgan, 2022, p. 73). Instead, it values the worldview of both the being (ontology; the researcher) and the knowing (epistemology; the chosen analytic framework). By reflecting on both the existence and the knowledge, researchers enhance their analysis, deepen their understanding of the documents, and improve the trustworthiness of the findings.

Thematic analysis is one common analytical approach for document analysis. Braun et al., (2019) identify three schools of thematic analysis. The first is the *coding reliability approach*, which focuses on accurately identifying codes and themes in the data through consensus among multiple independent coders, thereby creating domain summaries. This approach seeks to ensure the reliability of codes within the data by involving multiple independent coders. The second school is the *reflexive approach*, which emphasizes the researcher's role in actively developing meaning-based patterns without relying on predetermined themes. This approach may lead to subjective interpretations that are influenced by the researcher's background, experience, and personal beliefs. However, the reflexive approach views subjectivity not as a problem, but as a valuable resource. The third school is the *codebook approach*, which allows researchers to use themes derived from the data and those developed during data analysis. This approach blends the *coding reliability approach* and the *reflexive approach*.

AI and Its Applications in Qualitative Research

Thematic analysis helps identify patterns or themes within materials through a systematic, transparent process, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings (Christou, 2024). Some advantages of using AI include facilitating transcription and helping researchers generate initial ideas from the data. It can refine or generate definitions for themes, cluster information to explore ideas, and select or edit wording. However, there are limitations to consider. These include the potential for algorithmically generated biased themes, the loss of the human element in interpretation, and the risk of misinterpreting prompts or the data itself.

It is important to note that AI-generated responses are based on clusters of accessible information and may not always prioritize strict accuracy. The degree of information validity varies among different AI models and their functions. For example, standard generative AI systems generate content using pre-existing internet data, often delivering broad information and ideas but making it difficult to trace specific sources. In contrast, enhanced generative AI that incorporates retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) techniques employed may reduce hallucinations by restricting responses to a vetted set of sources.

When an AI system misinterprets a prompt or cannot identify relevant information from its available data sources—whether these are broad internet resources or carefully vetted databases—it may generate information that does not exist (the so-called hallucinations) or inadvertently misrepresent data. Rather than viewing this as a flaw unique to AI, perhaps researchers should recognize it as an inherent limitation and exercise caution when using AI.

Furthermore, because AI systems primarily cluster information based on prompts and algorithms, users who are dissatisfied with the AI-generated results can continue refining their input until the AI produces results that meet their expectations. Researchers can also compare results from different AI tools to determine which to use or combine, rather than revisiting the original data to resolve uncertainties. The only transparent aspect in this process is the documentation of the prompts researchers use to generate results. This raises another question: if users repeatedly attempt to generate results, will AI tools produce results closer to the “accuracy” of the data, or will they merely continue producing answers until they align with researchers’ preferred results?

Ethical issues in AI should extend beyond plagiarism (i.e., using AI-generated content as one’s own work). Researchers have the responsibility to provide reliable and valid information to the field. AI hallucinations pose a risk when researchers lack domain expertise to distinguish truth from false information and instead rely on AI outputs. Even experienced researchers can misuse AI. For instance, while AI can automatically generate “themes,” researchers may struggle to determine whether these themes are accurate or fabricated if they have not thoroughly reviewed the materials. Paulus and Marone (2025) argue:

It is the human researchers who have the ability to delve into the complex social problems that their studies are designed to solve, who make meaningful connections with the people involved in the research study, who have knowledge of the theoretical frameworks that can be used to make sense of the data generated with the participants, and who understand the nuances, complications, and messiness of human existence. More than just an analysis of textual data, qualitative inquiry requires deep engagement with what these texts mean to the humans who generated them. (p. 396)

They continue to say:

We are aware that this study may sound just like that in just a few years due to advances in AI technology. Nevertheless, methodological rigor and human agency in qualitative research will always be worth consideration through a reflective and critical stance. No matter how shocking it may sound to future readers, some qualitative researchers actually enjoy doing the heavy lifting, finding thought-provoking and meaningful what others consider a headache. (p. 401)

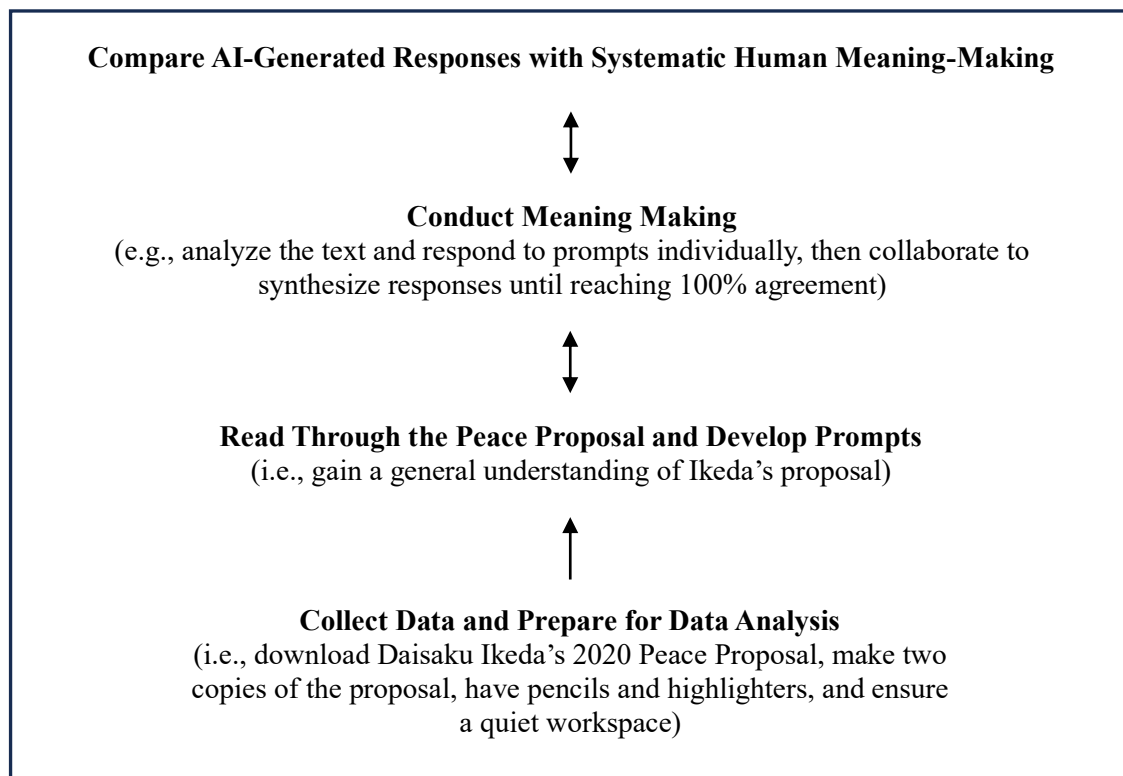
Paulus and Marone (2025) conclude that AI primarily assists with textual analysis, such as pattern detection. However, it falls short of the epistemological foundations of qualitative research, which emphasize systematic meaning-making, deeper data analysis, high engagement with the data, and recognition of human agency. They caution against the dangers of researchers becoming overly reliant on AI-generated automation, which often prioritizes efficiency over accuracy, meaning, and complexity. While they acknowledge the usefulness of AI, they believe that ongoing examination of its use will lead to improvements in both AI and researchers’ endeavors. Inappropriate use of AI technology leads to oversimplification of data, resulting in shallow understanding or misleading interpretations. Moreover, it can diminish researchers’ passion for uncovering thought-provoking and meaningful insights that only human agency can reveal, whereas AI technology tends to operate at a textual level.

Method

This study uses document analysis of Daisaku Ikeda's 2020 peace proposal to the United Nations to examine the ongoing debate over the use of AI in qualitative research. Figure 1 outlines the procedures for data collection and analysis.

Figure 1

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures for Comparing AI and Human Responses



The research team consisted of the author and her graduate research assistant. Although the assistant had completed research methods courses, she had no prior knowledge of Daisaku Ikeda or his work, which ensured a neutral perspective in her analysis. The procedures for data collection and analysis were as follows. First, the team downloaded the English-language PDF of Daisaku Ikeda's 2020 peace proposal, "Toward Our Shared Future: Constructing an Era of Human Solidarity," prepared highlighters and notebooks, and arranged for a quiet workspace. The proposal is available at <https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/works/props/2020-peace-proposal.html>. Second, they read through the proposal to gain a general understanding of Ikeda's message and developed four prompts. Third, before employing AI tools, both team members independently analyzed the proposal and responded to the prompts separately. They then exchanged and reviewed each other's answers, synthesizing them into a single paragraph for each prompt until they reached 100% agreement, ensuring that the final responses reflected the depth of Ikeda's messages. Disagreements were resolved through repeatedly revisiting the peace proposal, reviewing reading notes, consulting official resources, and engaging in discussions. Finally, the team compared AI-generated responses with systematic human meaning-making.

For the AI prompts, the team used Microsoft Education’s (2025) AI-prompting framework to develop adequate instructions. This framework comprises five elements: (1) persona—assigning a specific role to the AI tool; (2) objective—defining the intended action or output; (3) audience—identifying the target recipient; (4) context—providing relevant background information; and (5) boundaries—setting limitations or guidelines for the task. The study used two AI models: a standard generative AI that searches all pre-existing internet data, and an enhanced generative AI that incorporates retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) techniques to generate responses exclusively from the uploaded PDF of Ikeda’s 2020 peace proposal.

Findings

Building on the work of Paulus and Marone (2025) regarding the discursive constructions of generative AI and qualitative data analysis, this study aims to examine the four discursive dilemmas: “(a) automated insight-generation versus systematic meaning-making; (b) chatting with documents versus analyzing data; (c) high speed versus high engagement; and (d) novelty versus agency” (Paulus & Marone, 2025, p. 395) within the context of Ikeda/Soka studies.

Prompt #1. “Use a single, clear paragraph to analyze Daisaku Ikeda’s insights on climate action as stated in his 2020 peace proposal to the United Nations. Your analysis should use simple language so that anyone unfamiliar with Ikeda’s proposal can easily understand the main ideas.” Table 1 shows the AI-generated responses to Prompt #1, followed by human systematic meaning-making.

Table 1

AI-Generated Responses Regarding the Insights of Daisaku Ikeda’s 2020 Peace Proposal

Standard Generative AI Response (Based on all pre-existing internet data)	Enhanced Generative AI Response, RAG (Based on the PDF file of the peace proposal)
<p>“In his 2020 peace proposal to the United Nations, Daisaku Ikeda treats climate change as a shared human crisis rather than only an environmental or technical problem. He explains that climate change threatens human dignity, deepens inequality, and harms the most vulnerable people first. Ikeda stresses that the crisis is caused by human choices, so it can also be solved by human responsibility, cooperation, and compassion. He calls for global solidarity, long-term thinking, and ethical action that puts human life and future generations at the center. For Ikeda, climate action is inseparable from peacebuilding because protecting the planet also protects human security, social stability, and hope for the future.” (Source: ChatGPT-5)</p>	<p>“In his 2020 peace proposal, Daisaku Ikeda presents climate change as a serious threat to all humanity, similar in scale to the danger posed by nuclear weapons. He stresses that climate change is not just an environmental problem but a human one that affects people’s lives, dignity, and security, especially through extreme weather, displacement, and loss of livelihoods. At the same time, Ikeda sees climate change as an opportunity: because it affects everyone, it can inspire global cooperation and solidarity. He argues that how humanity responds to climate change will shape the future of the world, making it a defining challenge of our time that requires shared responsibility and collective action.” (Source: ChatGPT-5)</p>

What the Text Actually Says

Ikeda (2020) emphasized that climate change is a threat to everyone on Earth, both now and in the future. He highlighted recent extreme weather events—such as typhoons, rising sea levels,

earthquakes, and tsunamis—to illustrate their impact on both developed and developing nations. According to Ikeda, natural disasters have intensified the risks and challenges faced by those living in poverty and other vulnerable situations. Because no one can be exempt from its impacts, confronting climate change requires global solidarity and collective action. He discussed the elements required for solidarity and action, including leaving no one behind and recognizing unquantifiable indicators. Furthermore, he urged people to take collective, constructive action rather than merely share the sense of crisis, which often leads to feelings of powerlessness and indifference. He promoted creating opportunities for youth participation and believed that youth solidarity would bring indomitable optimism and limitless opportunities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Throughout the proposal, Ikeda often cited the teachings of his mentors, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) and Josei Toda (1900-1958), as well as Buddhist philosophy that emphasizes the dignity of human life. He asserted that “while categories have been generated and given names within society, in terms of their humanity, there are no distinctions among people” (Ikeda, 2020, p. 5). Ikeda also highlighted international organizations and peace exhibitions actively working to address the impacts of climate change.

Prompt #2. “Use a single, clear paragraph to analyze Daisaku Ikeda’s first commitment to climate action—leaving no one behind—as stated in his 2020 peace proposal to the United Nations. Your analysis should use simple language so that anyone unfamiliar with Ikeda’s proposal can easily understand the main ideas.” Table 2 shows the AI-generated responses to Prompt #2, followed by human systematic meaning-making.

Table 2

AI-Generated Responses Regarding Daisaku Ikeda’s First Commitment to Climate Action

Standard Generative AI Response (Based on all pre-existing internet data)	Enhanced Generative AI Response, RAG (Based on the PDF file of the peace proposal)
“Ikeda’s first commitment to climate action focuses on ‘leaving no one behind,’ meaning climate policies must protect the people who are most at risk. He points out that poor communities, small island nations, older adults, and future generations suffer the most from climate change even though they contribute the least to it. Ikeda argues that justice and fairness must guide climate action, so support, resources, and technology should be shared with those who need them most. This commitment emphasizes listening to vulnerable voices and ensuring that climate solutions reduce inequality rather than deepen it. For Ikeda, climate action must be humane, inclusive, and grounded in respect for every person’s dignity.” (Source: ChatGPT-5)	“Ikeda’s first commitment to climate action emphasizes protecting the most vulnerable people. He points out that climate change harms everyone, but it hits the poor, the elderly, women, children, and marginalized communities the hardest. These groups often suffer the most from disasters and have the fewest resources to recover. Ikeda argues that climate action must focus on human dignity, not just economic data or national interests. Helping people rebuild their lives, protecting their sense of belonging, and ensuring that no one is abandoned are essential. For Ikeda, true climate justice means standing with those who are suffering and making their needs the center of global responses.” (Source: ChatGPT-5)

What the Text Actually Says

Ikeda (2020) argued that the impacts of natural disasters “tend to be concentrated on and felt by people already afflicted by poverty and those in the more vulnerable sectors of society, such as women, children, and the elderly” (p. 2). He emphasized the importance of recognizing the

actual suffering of individuals, stating, “When discussing the impacts of climate change, there is a tendency to focus on the scale of economic loss or other quantifiable indicators. But I think it is important that we attend to the actual suffering of the many individuals...and make this central to our efforts to come together in search of solutions” (p. 3). For Ikeda, it is not merely the numbers that matter, but the dignity of each individual in their daily lives. One should strive to protect and improve not only one’s life, but also those of others. He emphasized that economic growth and efforts to mitigate global warming are not mutually exclusive; for instance, renewable energy and improved energy efficiency can help mitigate these challenges. When vulnerable people, particularly those in poverty and those with illnesses, are supported, they find creative ways to make progress. Drawing on Makiguchi’s insights, Ikeda asserted that true transformation in human history arises from humanitarian efforts rather than economic competition; people enrich their own lives through working for the benefit of others.

Prompt #3. “Use a single, clear paragraph to analyze Daisaku Ikeda’s second commitment to climate action—the challenge of construction—as stated in his 2020 peace proposal to the United Nations. Your analysis should use simple language so that anyone unfamiliar with Ikeda’s proposal can easily understand the main ideas.” Table 3 shows the AI-generated responses to Prompt #3, followed by human systematic meaning-making.

Table 3

AI-Generated Responses Regarding Daisaku Ikeda’s Second Commitment to Climate Action

Standard Generative AI Response (Based on all pre-existing internet data)	Enhanced Generative AI Response, RAG (Based on the PDF file of the peace proposal)
“The second commitment, which Ikeda calls ‘the challenge of construction,’ focuses on building positive and practical solutions instead of only criticizing existing systems. He urges governments, institutions, and citizens to actively create sustainable societies through renewable energy, resilient infrastructure, and responsible economic models. Ikeda believes that climate action requires creativity, cooperation, and courage to redesign how societies produce, consume, and live. This commitment highlights hope and possibility, encouraging people to see climate action as an opportunity to build safer, fairer, and more peaceful communities rather than as a burden or sacrifice.” (Source: ChatGPT-5)	“The second commitment focuses on moving beyond fear and warnings to actively building solutions. Ikeda explains that simply sharing a sense of crisis can leave people feeling powerless or indifferent. Instead, he calls for a clear, hopeful vision of the future and practical actions that people can take together. Climate action, in his view, should be creative and constructive—such as restoring ecosystems, changing energy systems, and improving daily habits. Small actions, when repeated by many people, can create large change. This commitment highlights that hope, imagination, and steady effort are necessary to turn concern about climate change into meaningful progress.” (Source: ChatGPT-5)

What the Text Actually Says

Drawing on his dialogue with the peace scholar and a world-renowned environmental activist, Elise Boulding (1920-2010), Ikeda (2020) emphasized the importance of a clear, specific vision of what a peaceful society should be. He referenced the Seeds of Change and Seeds of Hope exhibitions by the Soka Institute for Environmental Studies and Research of the Amazon in

Brazil. As a Buddhist philosopher, he then used the Buddhist concept of an ideal land—not in some distant place but right where people live—highlighting that each individual can become a source of limitless human potential and help transform their own environment into a peaceful place. He quoted the Kenyan environmental activist and 2004 Nobel Prize winner Wangari Maathai (1940–2011) during their conversation, stating, “The future does not exist in the future. Rather, it is born only through our actions in the present, and if we want to realize something in the future, we must take action toward it now” (Ikeda, 2020, p. 10). Another story mentioned in the Seeds of Hope exhibition is about Hazel Henderson (1933-2022), an American futurist and environmental activist who co-authored a dialogue book with Ikeda titled “Planetary Citizenship: Your Values, Beliefs, and Actions Can Shape a Sustainable World” in 2004. Ikeda firmly believed that “...climate change is one of the cornerstone issues driving dialogue at the UN...Through the kind of collaborative efforts that will emerge from these dialogues and through the expansion of a vision that people can connect with and share, I am confident that we will be able to accelerate momentum toward combating global warming even as we solidify the groundwork for a sustainable global society” (Ikeda, 2020, pp. 11-12). Global warming is human-caused, so the solutions must come from human beings (Ikeda, 2020).

Prompt #4. “Use a single, clear paragraph to analyze Daisaku Ikeda’s third commitment to climate action—youth-led climate action—the challenge of construction—as stated in his 2020 peace proposal to the United Nations. Your analysis should use simple language so that anyone unfamiliar with Ikeda’s proposal can easily understand the main ideas.” Table 4 shows the AI-generated responses to Prompt #4, followed by human systematic meaning-making.

Table 4

AI-Generated Responses Regarding Daisaku Ikeda’s Third Commitment to Climate Action

Standard Generative AI Response (Based on all pre-existing internet data)	Enhanced Generative AI Response, RAG (Based on the PDF file of the peace proposal)
“Ikeda’s third commitment emphasizes the central role of young people in leading climate action. He views youth not only as future leaders but as active agents of change today. Ikeda believes young people bring moral clarity, energy, and a strong sense of responsibility toward future generations. He calls on societies to trust youth, support their education, and create spaces where their voices influence policy and decision-making. Youth-led climate action, in Ikeda’s view, helps transform fear and frustration into hope and action, ensuring that climate efforts remain forward-looking, inclusive, and rooted in a long-term vision for humanity and the planet.” (Source: ChatGPT)	“Ikeda’s third commitment highlights the central role of young people in leading climate action. He praises youth movements for bringing urgency, energy, and moral clarity to the climate crisis. Young people, he argues, are not just future leaders but present actors who understand the science and demand change because their lives are directly affected. Ikeda supports giving youth a real voice in decision-making at local, national, and global levels, including within the United Nations. By combining their strong sense of justice with optimism and creativity, young people can drive powerful change and help guide the world toward a more sustainable and hopeful future.” (Source: ChatGPT)

What the Text Actually Says

Ikeda (2020) expressed his enthusiasm over the United Nations hosting the Youth Climate Summit, a significant event he had advocated since 2006 to encourage youth participation in

climate action. He acknowledged various student movements that have emerged globally, including Swedish high school student Greta Thunberg, who has inspired young people and individuals of all ages to join the fight against climate change. Ikeda praised Christiana Figueres, a key figure in the Paris climate conference, for her insights on youth activism: “She explained that the young people know that change is not impossible and that is why they are expressing outrage at the slow pace of efforts to prevent global warming; and that moving forward, if the outrage is married with optimism, we can expect something even more powerful to emerge” (p. 13). He also cited Aurelio Peccei (1908–84), his co-author of “Before It Is Too Late” and founder of the Club of Rome, emphasizing the importance of youth voices in climate action and social reform. Ikeda (2020) argued that “Precisely because it is so complex and requires a multifaceted approach, we can view the challenge of climate change as presenting a remarkable diversity of opportunities for human beings to give expression to their limitless potential” (p. 15). He is convinced that engaging youth in climate-related decision-making will enhance their contributions to peace and security. He concluded with a powerful message: “The path to resolving the problem of climate change and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be smooth or easy. However, I am deeply confident that as long as there is solidarity among youth, there is no impasse we cannot surmount” (p. 16).

Discussion

Paulus and Marone (2025) highlight four key dilemmas at the intersection of AI and human research, each accompanied by reflection questions on the purpose of qualitative inquiry. To explore these issues in practice, the present study draws on concrete examples from Ikeda’s peace proposal to demonstrate how these dilemmas play out in the actual research context.

Reflecting on Discursive Dilemma #1: Automated Insight-Generation vs. Systematic Meaning-Making

While the AI’s automated insight generation may initially appear persuasive, its responses are often general and lack depth and nuance. For instance, in Prompt #1, the AI states that Ikeda “stresses that climate change is not just an environmental problem but a human one that affects people’s lives, dignity, and security, especially through extreme weather, displacement, and loss of livelihoods.” This statement does not capture the heartfelt core of Ikeda’s peace proposal, which expresses his deep compassion for those who have suffered from climate change and for individuals who have lost their sense of identity due to displacement from their ancestral lands. Both standard and enhanced AI fail to provide readers with a clearer picture of the human stakeholders involved. Young people, whom Ikeda emphasized as a driving force for optimism and progress, are also overlooked in AI-generated responses. Another nuanced discussion of economic competition is also missing. Drawing on Makiguchi’s perspective, Ikeda observed that “Makiguchi never denied the value of competition within the workings of society, considering a mutual striving for excellence to be an enriching source of energy and creativity. What he found problematic was our tendency to view the world as solely the site of competition for survival, to base our behavior on the assumption that our lives are independent of all others, and to remain in denial regarding the effects of such behavior” (Ikeda, 2020, p. 4).

Paulus and Marone (2025) caution that while AI technology offers increased efficiency in qualitative research, it may do so at the expense of data depth and richness. The findings of the present study support this concern, showing that AI-driven efficiency often comes at the expense of the nuanced understanding and complexity inherent in Ikeda's peace proposal. Researchers who over-rely on AI-generated responses and fail to engage directly with Ikeda's (2020) peace proposal risk overlooking its true significance and underestimating its depth. This can lead to a surface-level understanding and diminish the motivation to act meaningfully. Additionally, because AI-generated responses are constructed from patterns, accessible data, and algorithms, they are not always consistent—even when identical prompts are used. As a result, automated insights can be unreliable and may lead to oversimplified interpretations.

Reflecting on Discursive Dilemma #2: Chatting with Documents vs. Analyzing Data

The AI's response to the prompt does not accurately address the specifics of Ikeda's 2020 peace proposal. For example, in Prompt #2, while the AI states that Ikeda focused on the poor, the elderly, women, children, and marginalized communities hardest hit by climate change, his proposal explains how these vulnerable individuals are often overlooked when society prioritizes economic competition. Although the AI's response employs persuasive reasoning, the absence of a humanistic element makes it less impactful, as reasoning alone fails to resonate with people's hearts or motivate them to take action. Furthermore, even with highly specific prompts, the AI's responses tend to be general, allowing its statements and patterns to be easily adapted to different contexts with minimal modification. As a result, the concrete, specific examples Ikeda used in his proposal are replaced in the AI's responses with general statements.

Using AI for qualitative data analysis raises questions about the relationships among the researcher, the data, and the AI technology (Paulus & Marone, 2025). If researchers are not well-acquainted with their data, they will not be able to distinguish information generated by the AI. AI's responses are based on algorithms, which can make them appear reasoned and persuasive, but they are not necessarily accurate or reflect the depth of Ikeda's message. When the relationship between the researcher and the data is weak, the data may be distorted in ways that the researcher cannot detect, ultimately harming the integrity of the research. AI technology can be valuable when researchers are familiar with their data and use it to assist rather than replace their analysis. Ultimately, we—the people—are the superintelligence, not technology.

Reflecting on Discursive Dilemma #3: High Speed vs. High Engagement

The AI's response appears to have produced a general summary in a second by compiling information available online or from the file uploaded to the system, rather than engaging deeply with Ikeda's proposal. All the richness of the message conveyed in Ikeda's proposal is absent from the AI's responses. Especially in standard AI systems that allow searching all pre-existing internet data, AI rephrases the prompt and expands on it by drawing on various available resources. Such generic responses can be readily adapted to similar prompts by substituting Ikeda with another global leader without losing context. More concerning is the shallow information generated by AI, which often resembles preaching and is unlikely to inspire meaningful change.

Paulus and Marone (2025) warn researchers using AI that efficiency may come at the expense of research quality. The example from the present study on Ikeda's peace proposal clearly shows that speed does not outweigh quality; AI-generated information lacks substantive content relative to the original text. While AI technology may seem efficient, it ultimately costs researchers more time by requiring them to read shallow, irrelevant, or fabricated information, jeopardizing the credibility of their research and leading to confusion and disengagement. What seems efficient ultimately proves slow.

Reflecting on Discursive Dilemma #4: Novelty vs. Agency

The AI's response contains not only fabricated information but also inaccuracies regarding Ikeda's peace proposal, such as, in Prompt #4, saying, "Young people, he argues, are not just future leaders but present actors who understand the science and demand change because their lives are directly affected." This quote was actually from Christiana Figueres's statement, not Ikeda's. It is evident that the AI's response is overly general and fails to address the specific nuances of the peace proposal. As a result, the richness of the proposal is lost in the AI's response, and the human connection that explains why and how to tackle climate change is also absent. Researchers who lack a solid understanding of Ikeda's peace proposal will gain little to no valuable insight and will easily be misled by the AI's responses.

Paulus and Marone (2025) emphasize the importance of reflecting on the nature and purpose of qualitative research, asserting that human researchers play a crucial role in data analysis. The complexity inherent in qualitative data analysis is not a problem to be solved. Instead, it enables researchers to uncover profound meanings hidden between the lines. Although analyzing large volumes of qualitative data can be time-consuming, the present study, using Ikeda's peace proposal as an example, illustrates how AI-generated responses tend to be general and often unrelated to the source material. Researchers who lack familiarity with their data may find it challenging to verify the accuracy of information produced by AI. Unlike numerical data, which can be definitively quantified (e.g., 1 plus 1 equals 2), AI technology cannot grasp the depth and richness of human messages in qualitative data; it merely collects and organizes information according to its programmed algorithms.

Conclusion

With AI being increasingly used in qualitative research, it is important to establish clear boundaries between what should and should not be handled by computerized intelligence. Human feelings and experiences can only be understood through life-to-life contact. The misuse of AI not only undermines the integrity of qualitative research but also diminishes the human experience for both researchers and research participants. Reading and disseminating shallow AI-generated messages leads people to oversimplify and lose their rich humanity. Developing intuition and poetic spirit is to embrace human imagination and creativity, from which hope and limitless possibilities arise, qualities that AI can never achieve (Goulah, 2024a). Ikeda (2000) states, "We must never lose sight of the fact that, however much...technology may advance, people still count. It is the individual - it is the character of each individual - that is decisive as the creator and protagonist of culture" (p. 5). Qualitative data analysis using AI leads to information consumption, while human-driven qualitative analysis fosters knowledge creation.

A healthy relationship among the researcher, the data, and AI can lead to better outcomes. In this balanced dynamic, both researchers and AI can effectively support one another. The allure of AI's false efficiency must be critically examined, and its role in qualitative research must be clearly defined. Research studies are intended to make a meaningful impact on people's lives and are grounded in genuine concern for those lives, not merely in moving data around. When researchers thoughtfully consider how their studies affect individuals, they are more likely to engage actively in their work and avoid falling prey to the false efficiency of AI in data analysis.

The four examples discussed in this article highlight the significant risks AI technology can pose to qualitative research, particularly in document analysis, when researchers have not spent the time to become thoroughly familiar with their data. Paulus and Marone (2025) have warned that, while AI's automated insights, chat box, rapid data processing, and novelty may seem efficient, they come at a cost. The trade-offs include a loss of systematic meaning-making, data analysis, high engagement, and human agency. In the era of AI, the question is not whether we should use AI in qualitative research, but rather who is using it and how. Letting AI do the work for humans is like sending a robot to the gym to exercise on someone's behalf. While AI can enhance human performance and protect well-being, the essential work—essentially the exercise—must still be done by humans. In other words, if researchers want to improve their research capabilities, they must put in the effort themselves; AI cannot do this for them. AI technology can assist researchers with what they already know, not with what they do not know. Since AI has no human intuition and does not possess what Ikeda referred to as “the poetic spirit,” a quality unique to human beings, it cannot inspire a transformation in a life or in society as a whole.

In conclusion, users of AI technology need to ensure it is used for its intended purpose: to assist rather than to replace human effort. They should also remain aware of the limitations of AI. A solid foundation of domain knowledge is essential for assessing the accuracy of AI-generated responses. While the efficiency of AI tools is appealing, researchers should always ponder the question: “What is the purpose of conducting qualitative research?” Ultimately, research is not about presenting isolated pieces of information that can be easily generated by AI but about impacting lives through the depth of understanding.

Declarations

Acknowledgments: The author would like to thank the institutions and individuals whose publicly available documents contributed to this study.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Ethics Statements: This study is based on document analysis of a publicly available source (Daisaku Ikeda's peace proposal) and does not involve human participants or animals. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent: Not applicable, as the study does not involve human participants.

Data availability: The data supporting the findings of this study are publicly available and can be accessed through Daisaku Ikeda's published peace proposals.

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