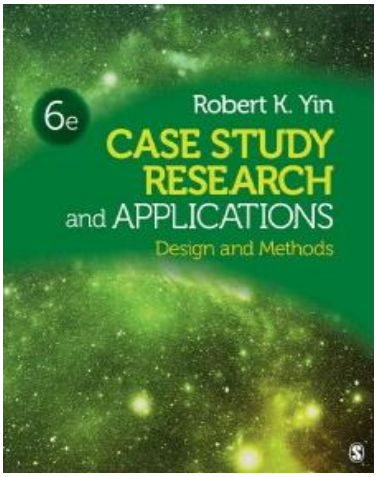

Title:	**Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods** (6th ed.)
Author	Robert K. Yin
Publisher	Sage Publication, Inc
Year	2018 (6th ed.)
Pages	319

A Book Review: Case Study Research and Applications

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This recently published book might add to our understanding of conducting case study research and eventually writing a high-quality case study paper. In general, chapter one defines a case study and when and why a researcher needs to conduct that study. Chapter two suggests ways to formulate a research question, select a case, and ensure rigor for the research. Chapters three and four similarly discuss various data collection procedures and why those procedures need to be done. Chapter five presents practical strategies to do quality data analysis. The last chapter is about tips to report a case study research. Readable vocabulary and supporting figures should help readers (e.g., novice researchers, college or graduate students, and teachers) easily comprehend the persuasive information presented in those six chapters. The next sections will discuss some takeaways that I could learn from the book.

Formulating a Research Question

Yin informs that a case study might be better approached using a *how* or *why* research question than a *what* research question, which is likely to be more suitable for a survey study or in analyzing archival records. However, not all readers of Yin's book may agree with that point, particularly those who also like to cite other educational research books. For example, in their book, Ary et al. (2019) wrote that "case studies can answer descriptive questions (*what* happened), and the underlying question in case studies is *what* are the characteristics of this particular entity, phenomenon, person, or setting?" (p. 392). Besides, Yin's point might be controversial as some case studies published in peer-reviewed journals still used the *what* research question (e.g., see Mindog, 2016; Sahin & Yildirim, 2016; Vo & Nguyen, 2010) or even did not ask the *how* or *why* question at all (e.g., see Astika, 2014;

Farrell & Guz, 2019; Saeed & Ghazali, 2019; Tuğa, 2013).

Supporting Figures

In the book, two figures are helpful for the readers in designing a case study. First, "Figure 2.1." (see Yin, 2018, p. 32) should address confusion among novice researchers or graduate students about what a case looks like or "what is exactly a case (cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 257)?" With that figure, those who have just started their first case study might better understand that their case can be about "individuals, small groups, organizations, and projects" (see Yin, 2018, p. 32). Second, "Figure 2.4." (see Yin, 2018, p. 48) can help to differentiate four basic types of case studies and be cited to explain a case study design used in a research paper.

Involving People Outside the Research

Yin also highlights the presence of other people to support case study research. For instance, researchers can invite their colleagues to see if they have selected the right case and discuss the rationale for conducting their case study. They can also pilot their data collection procedures or interview questions with their colleagues to receive inputs and make necessary revisions before actual data collection. Researchers may also discuss their preliminary findings (e.g., Do they make biased findings? Do the findings answer their research question(s)? Do they need to collect additional data?) and ask their colleagues to provide alternative interpretations of the findings. Some researchers (e.g., Ary et al., 2019; Kozleski, 2017) called the people as triangulating analysts or individuals outside researchers' project who will review their analysis independently and challenge their views to enhance the credibility of their data analysis results.

Making a Generalization from a Case

Critically, Yin argues that a research sample in a case study is not like a sampling unit in quantitative (survey) research. Case study researchers are not making a statistical conclusion from their case. Therefore, "rather than thinking about your case(s) as a sample, you should think of your case study as the opportunity to shed empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles" (Yin, 2018, p. 38). Yin's view accords with who mentioned that "a case study is not intended to represent the entire population from which the participant is drawn" (p. 212). In line with this argument, Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated that the focus of a case study research is not on its generalizability. Therefore, future case study researchers might not need to write the following sentences in their research paper: "As this study focused on the development of one pair of team-teaching teachers, its findings may not be readily generalizable to other team-teaching situations"(Chen & Cheng, 2014, p. 45) or "this study was a small-scale study, and the results obtained cannot be generalized to another educational context" (Ting & Qian, 2010, p. 97).

Ensuring the Rigor of a Case Study

Further, Yin discusses ways to ensure the rigor of a case study. For example, to ensure internal validity, Yin highlights the essence of providing a detailed description of any factors that might affect a case study conclusion. In some case study papers, that internal validity might be related to a researcher's positionality (as examples, see Laufer & Gorup, 2019, p. 170; Newcomer, 2017, p. 5), which informs readers about background experiences (e.g., beliefs, assumptions, and social backgrounds) (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019) that researchers brought to their research and conflicts of

interest that might affect their study (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). However, Yin's point about the rigor of a case study is often neglected when some researchers describe their method. Without that description, readers might be skeptical of conclusions made in a case study. They might also assume that data analysis results "have been shaped according to the predispositions, assumptions, and biases of the researchers" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 433).

Addressing Rival Explanation

The book repeatedly mentions the ideas of rival explanation or "a plausible alternative-contrasting with a case study's originally stipulated propositions-for interpreting the data or findings in a case study (whether descriptive or explanatory)" (Yin, 2018, p. 288). For some types of rival explanations, see "Figure 5.1." (Yin, 2018, p. 173). With that idea, Yin perhaps wants researchers to have a balanced argument in their exploration; they should review previous studies that might challenge or provide alternative thoughts on their research findings (not only the ones that support their arguments). Then, they should present those studies in a discussion section of their research paper. Yin believed that the more rival explanations we have addressed, the stronger our findings will be.

Reporting a Case Study

In the last chapter, Yin suggests practical ways to report a case study so that researchers can "seduce readers' eyes" (Yin, 2018, p. 218) when reading their study. While the chapter communicates many different ways, I would like to emphasize some of them. The first one is to know the target audiences of the paper. Without knowing the target audience and understanding their specific needs, case study researchers are likely to compose a paper from "an egocentric perspective, and that is the greatest error they can make" (Yin, 2018, p. 224). The second one is to present simple, appealing figures to help readers understand some information. In some studies, those figures were used to illustrate a theoretical framework (see Newcomer, 2017, p. 5), explain data collection procedures (see Sahin & Yildirim, 2016, pp. 245-246), or present research findings (see Astika, 2014, p. 23; Mindog, 2016, p. 12). The third one is to review previous studies "that have successfully shared their findings with the same target audience" (Yin, 2018, p. 224). I support Yin's recommendation that readers need to learn how the previous researchers organize ideas, write their literature review, present and discuss their findings, and finally conclude their paper. In closing, Yin highlights the essence of becoming truthful and transparent case study researchers who should acknowledge all potential limitations of their case study, present evidence as they are, and *not* manipulate data to reach some expected conclusions.

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