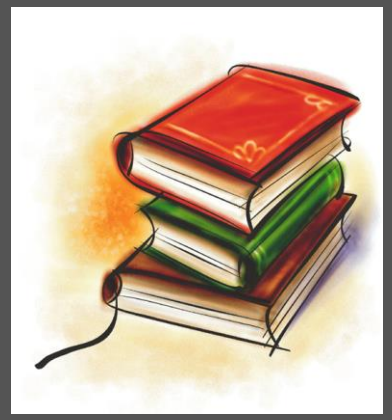
Thematic Analysis



Intended Learning outcomes

After this lecture, and with further reading, you should be able to:

- Understand the meaning of Thematic Analysis (TA).
- Describe the steps for conducting TA.
- Understand definitions of codes and themes.
- Determine types of coding used in TA.

Lecture outline

- Definition of Thematic analysis.
- Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis.
- Steps of Thematic analysis

Transcribing the data.

- Given that audio or video data are commonly collected in qualitative research, qualitative researchers generally allocate time to transcribing the data in preparation for further analysis.

- For thematic analysis, verbatim transcripts are quite common; that is, transcripts that aim to capture every utterance from the participant and serve as an accurate record of the conversation.

What is Thematic analysis?

- The process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data

- The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes, i.e. patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research

- Thematic analysis is more than simply summarising the data.

(Maguire & Delahunt, 2017)

What is Thematic analysis?

- TA is a method of “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data”.
- It is described as a descriptive method that reduces the data in a flexible way.
- It is used commonly because of the wide variety of research questions and topics that can be addressed with this method of data analysis.
- TA of open ended responses from surveys or transcribed interviews can explore the context of teaching and learning at a level of depth that quantitative analysis lacks while allowing flexibility and interpretation when analysing the data.
- but it should be undertaken with special care and attention to transparency of the method in order to ensure confidence in the findings.

Thematic Analysis

- Thematic analysis is the most common form of analysis in qualitative research
- It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (themes) within data
- Themes are patterns across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated to a specific research question
- The themes become the categories for analysis
- Thematic analysis is performed through the process of coding in six phases to create established, meaningful patterns. These phases are: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

What is the definition of theme?

- Based on a study by DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) conducted on qualitative papers between 1979 and 1998, 40% of the papers had used the word “theme” in their studies.
- According to them no specific definition of them was found in the aforementioned papers. However, several definitions of the word “theme” which exist in different sources are as follows:

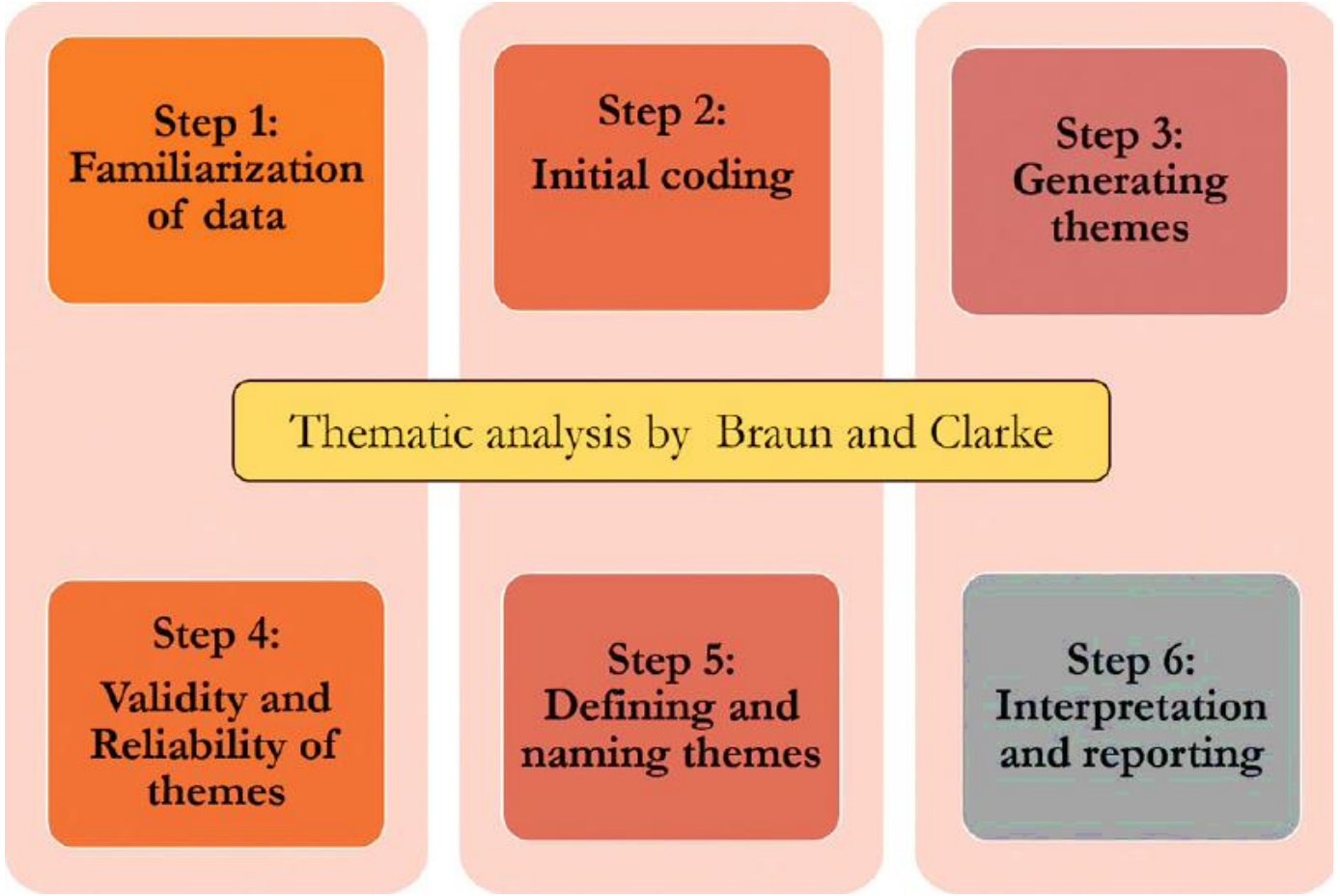
- Brink, Wood (1997):The term “theme” is used for describing the fact that the data are grouped around a main issue.
- Speziale , Streubert (2011): theme is a structural meaningful unit of data which is necessary for providing qualitative findings.
- Polit, Hungler (1999): a recurrent and systematic occurrence which appears in qualitative data analysis.

Keep in mind……

- Analysis is saying: What does the data say.

- Interpretation is saying: What does it mean?

Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis



Doing Thematic Analysis (TA)

Step 1: Become familiar with the data	**Step 4:** Review themes
Step 2: Generate initial codes	**Step 5**: Define themes
Step 3: Search for themes	**Step 6**: Write-up

Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Step 1: Become familiar with the data

- The first step in any qualitative analysis is reading, and re-reading the transcripts.
- Conduct an initial read through the transcripts and/or notes from participant observation, documents and so on.
- You should be very familiar with your entire body of data or data corpus (i.e. all the interviews).
- Researchers must **immerse** themselves with the data to familiarize themselves with the depth and breadth of the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- At this stage, it is useful to make notes and jot down early impressions (Lincoln, 2007).

Step 1: Become familiar with the data

- Once transcribed, interview transcripts should have margins on the left and right sides of the text for coding, particularly when using hand-coding techniques.

- Participant observation protocols typically include a left column for descriptive notes and a right column for reflective notes used together in the analysis often to bolster or triangulate findings from the interview data.

(Creswell, 2002)

Step 1: Become familiar with the data

- Get a sense of the data holistically, read several times (immersion)
- Classify and categorize repeatedly, allowing for deeper immersion
- Write notes in the margins (memoing)
- Preliminary classification schemes emerge, categorize raw data into groupings (chunking)

Step 1: Become familiar with the data

- You should remember that all parts of the data are important and if you study some parts selectively, you may ignore other parts.

- In fact, it is through examining the data that specific patterns and meanings in the writings gradually emerge.

Example on rough notes made on interviews transcripts (Research focus, question: What are students' perceptions of feedback?)

The students do seem to think that feedback is important but don't always find it useful. There's a sense that the whole assessment process, including feedback, can be seen as threatening and is not always understood. The students are very clear that they want very specific feedback that tells them how to improve in a personalised way. They want to be able to discuss their work on a one-to-one basis with lecturers, as this is more personal and also private. The emotional impact of feedback is important.

Step 2: Generate initial codes

- Codes and coding are sometimes called labels and labelling (Rapley, 2011).

- Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive information compiled during a study (Huberman, Miles, & Saldana, 2014).

- We coded each segment of data that was relevant to or captured something interesting about our research question.
- A code is simply a short, descriptive word or phrase that assigns meaning to the data related to the researcher's analytic interests.
- When applicable, in vivo codes are assigned.

❑In vivo codes are phrases taken from the participants to capture the meaning of the line or text passage (Babchuk, 2019).

Step 2: Generate initial codes (Continued)

- Coding allows the researcher to simplify and focus on specific characteristics of the data.

- Researchers will move from unstructured data to the development of ideas about what is going on in the data (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Step 2: Generate initial codes (Continued)

- Labels can be about actions, activities, concepts, differences, opinions, processes or whatever you think it is relevant.
- You might decide that something is relevant because:

❑ It is repeated in several places;

❑ It surprises you;

❑ The interviewee explicitly states that it is important;

❑ You have read about something similar in previous published research;

❑ It reminds you of a theory or concept.

Step 2: Generate initial codes – Types of coding

- Structural coding (or index coding): Coding based on questions (research questions, interview guide questions) and/or topics of inquiry.

- Descriptive coding: Coding of the basic topics of chunks of data (often a noun).

- Process coding: Using gerunds ("-ing" words) to code action in the data (Frequently used in grounded theory).

Example on codes

Themes	Codes
The purpose of feedback	Help to learn what you're doing wrong. Unable to judge whether question has been answered. Unable to judge whether question interpreted Properly. Improving grade. Improving structure.
Emotional response to feedback	Like to get fdbk (Feedback) Difficult for L to predict impact Student variability in response to feedback Fdbk taken personally initially Don't want to get fdbk if haven't done Well. Reluctance to hear criticism. Fear of possible criticism. Want fdbk in L's (Lecturers) office as emotional response difficult to manage in public. Negative fdbk can be constructive. Negative fdbk can be framed in a supportive way

Example on codes

- An interview with a family member ("I") who had witnessed abusive situations between two relatives; an older man ("he") who provided care for his wife, who suffered from mental and physical disabilities ("she"):

Interview transcript	Initial notes	Codes	Themes
She doesn't get the care she wants. Then she gets worked up, screaming, kicking, making a scene	She gets agitated and makes a scene	Wife's role in the abusive situation	Being caught in a cycle of violence
He goes crazy then	He responds and "goes crazy"	Husband's role in the abusive situation	Being caught in a cycle of violence
After these episodes I think is when I have seen the bruises	After these episodes I have seen bruises	Evidence of abuse	Being caught in a cycle of violence

Step 3: Search for themes

- Theme is the subjective meaning and cultural-contextual message of data.

- Theme is a red thread of underlying meanings, within which similar pieces of data can be tied together and within which the researcher may answer the question "why?“

(Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013)

Step 3: Search for themes (Continued)

- We examined the codes, some of them clearly fitted together into an initial theme.

- The themes produced at this stage are considered preliminary.

(Maguire & Delahunt, 2017)

Step 3: Search for themes (Continued)

- The themes are sought from the codes whenever the initial codes are formed.
- For this purpose, you should know the codes. You have a long list of different codes. You can gradually bring similar codes under a set. You can give a name to each set and write a concise explanation for that name separately.
- Then try to organize the code sets meaningfully. Some codes form theme, some others are subthemes and some are codes that do not belong to a theme yet and they are necessary to be written temporarily to later determining the themes they belong to; or it may be necessary to extract a theme from them.

Step 4: Review themes

- Themes should be coherent and they should be distinct from each other.

- At this step, we may delete themes, collapse themes together, and identify subthemes.

- Things to think about include:

❑Do the themes make sense?

❑Does the data support the themes?

❑ Are there themes within themes (subthemes)?

❑Are there other themes within the data?

(Maguire & Delahunt, 2017)

Step 4: Review themes (Continued)

- In the previous example (slide #20), upon reviewing the themes, it has been found that subtheme can be established under emotional response to feedback theme.

- Therefore, Feedback as potentially threatening was generated as a subtheme within the broader theme Emotional Response to feedback.

Step 4: Review themes (Continued)

Theme: Emotional response to feedback

Like to get fdbk,
Difficult for L to predict impact
Student variability in response to feedback

Subtheme: Feedback as potentially threatening
Don't want to get fdbk if haven't done well.
Reluctance to hear criticism,
Fear of possible criticism,
Fdbk taken personally initially
Fdbk has an emotional impact
Want fdbk in L's office as emotional response difficult to manage in the public.
Negative fdbk can be framed in a supportive way

Step 4: Review themes (Continued)

- At the end of this phase, researchers have a good idea of the different themes, how they fit together, and the overall story they tell about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 5: Define Themes

- This is the final refinement of the themes and the aim is to '..identify the 'essence' of what each theme is about.'.(Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- During this phase, we wrote detailed analysis for each individual theme, identifying the story that each theme told while considering how each theme fit into the overall story about the entire data set in relation to the research questions.

- In this stage, we may do renaming for the themes (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

- Theme names need to be punchy and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Step 5: Define Themes

- A solo researcher may consult outside experts to determine whether the themes are sufficiently clear and comprehensive (King, Cassell, & Symon, 2004).

- The process of peer debriefing, with someone who knows a great deal about the area of the inquiry and the method of thematic analysis, will help expose the researcher to aspects of the research that might otherwise remain unspoken (Lincoln, 2007).

Step 6: Write-up

- Usually the end-point of research is some kind of report, often a journal article or dissertation.

- Direct quotes from participants are an essential component of the final report (King, Cassell, & Symon, 2004).

- Literature can be used to confirm the research findings as well as provide an opportunity to challenge and add to the literature (Tuckett, 2005).

Step 6: Write-up

- Many authors recommend submitting the analyses to participants for their feedback through the process of member checking (Côté & Turgeon, 2005).

Papers using TA

- The Physicians’ empathy levels in a primary care setting: perceptions of patients and their physicians, a qualitative study work process.

- Physicians' understanding and practices of Pharmacovigilance: qualitative experience from A lower middle-income country

References

- Babchuk, W. A. (2019). Fundamentals of qualitative analysis in family medicine. *Family Medicine and Community Health, 7*(2), e000040.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.
- Côté, L., & Turgeon, J. (2005). Appraising qualitative research articles in medicine and medical education. *Medical teacher, 27*(1), 71-75.
- Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative*: Prentice Hall Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Erlingsson, C., & Brysiewicz, P. (2013). Orientation among multiple truths: An introduction to qualitative research. *African Journal of emergency medicine, 3*(2), 92-99.
- Huberman, A., Miles, M., & Saldana, J. (2014). Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook: Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- King, N., Cassell, C., & Symon, G. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research, 2*, 256-270.
- Lincoln, Y. S. (2007). Naturalistic inquiry. *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*.
- Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *AISHE-J: The All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 9*(3).
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16*(1), 1609406917733847.
- Rapley, T. (2011). Some pragmatics of data analysis. *Qualitative Research, 3*, 273-290.
- Tuckett, A. G. (2005). Applying thematic analysis theory to practice: a researcher's experience. *Contemporary nurse, 19*(1-2), 75-87.

THANK YOU