THEMATIC ANALYSIS IN QUALITATIVE ARTS RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Thematic analysis is a useful method of analyzing qualitative arts research. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes within data". Boyatzis (1998), cited in Braun and Clarke (2006), suggested that thematic analysis is "a tool to use across different methods" (p. 78). In this paper, I will explain how I used thematic analysis to identify the patterns that derived from the multiple data from my interviews, transcriptions and journal entries that I had collected for my study and I share the different levels in identifying themes: at the explicit level, as well as at the interpretive level.

Keywords: *thematic analysis, patterns, coding, qualitative, interpretive, explicit, themes*

1. Introduction

Thematic analysis is a way for categorizing qualitative data. This type of analysis helps researchers analyze a huge rage of data sets towards discovering patterns and developing themes. Boyatzis (1998) defines thematic analysis as a process of "encoding qualitative information" (p. vii) where the researcher identifies 'codes' often labelled for different sections of data. Along the same lines, Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data." (p. 79). Boyatzis (1998) further suggested that thematic analysis is "a tool to use across different methods" (p. 78). The aim of using thematic analysis in a qualitative research is to categorize patterns of meanings across a dataset that answers the researcher's research question. One of the benefits of using thematic analysis is that it can be used within different frameworks, to answer quite different types of research question. Boyatzis (1998) argued that through this flexibility, "thematic analysis allows for rich, detailed and complex description of the data." In this conceptual paper, I explore the different levels in identifying themes: at the explicit level, as well as at the interpretive level, and finally, I will explain how I used thematic analysis to identify the patterns that derived from the multiple data from my interviews, transcriptions and journal entries that I had collected for my study.
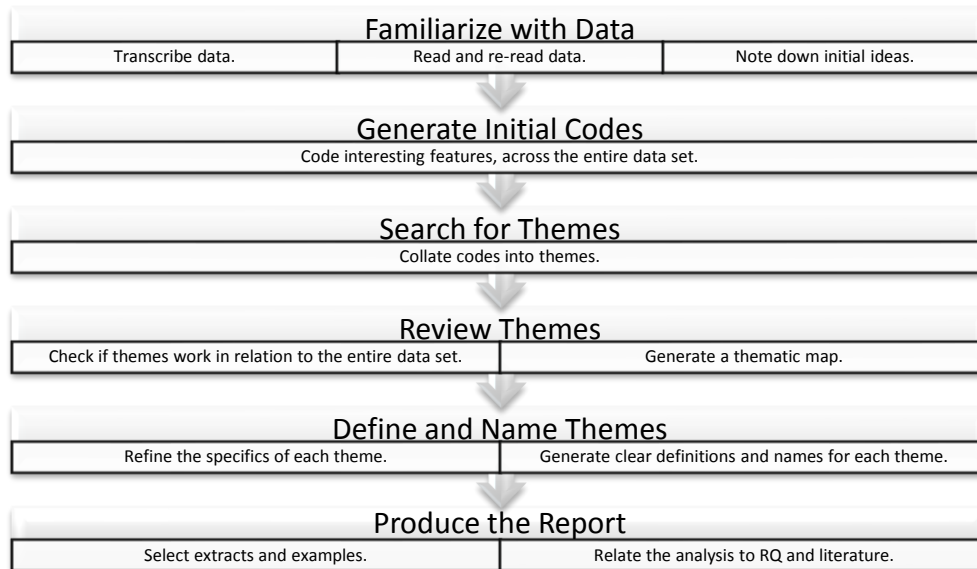
2. Organizing data for analysis

Parsons and Brown (2002) suggested that qualitative data be "organized, described and interpreted in ways that facilitate understanding of these data" (p. 55). Likewise, Cohen and Manion (2006) proposed that the data analysis of qualitative research can be organized and

presented in ways such as based on individual grouping, people grouping, issues, research questions and instruments. Cohen and Manion agreed with Parsons and Brown (2002) that data can be analyzed based on group analysis or individual analysis. For example, if two or more respondents have similar opinions and perceptions, data will be organized by groups of respondents.

A second method of data analysis is by individual analysis. "The total responses of a single participant are presented, and then the analysis moves on to the next individual" (Cohen and Manion, 2006, p. 467). A third data analysis method is by looking at the "data relevant to a particular issue" (Cohen & Manion, 2006, p. 467). In this case, it is important to justify the issues that need to be examined closely. A fourth method of data analysis is by analyzing and describing the data based on the research questions. In this approach, all the relevant data from the research designs are grouped together to provide answers to the research questions. The final approach is the grouping of research instruments, in which all data from the selected research instruments are presented one after another.

I did a study looking at the impact of process drama on student learning. I collected multiple data from student journal to teacher observation, stimulated recall interview, focus interview and video data. Because multiple data sources were used, I decided that using thematic analysis was the best option for analyzing the rich data, because thematic analysis was a flexible approach. During my data analysis, I used the fourth method of data analysis which described my data based on the research questions. I laid out the research questions I needed answers for and grouped the data based on the research questions. Specific qualitative evidences in the transcriptions were used to illustrate the thematic patterns that emerged. In order to ensure that findings and interpretations of the data are accurate and reliable, Creswell (2014) mentioned that triangulation can be used in qualitative analysis. This is a process of verifying evidence from a range of different data collection methods. There are six steps that are involved in analyzing qualitative data thematically. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested the following: familiarizing ourselves with our data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally producing the report.

Familiarize with Data		
Transcribe data.	Read and re-read data.	Note down initial ideas.

Generate Initial Codes
Code interesting features, across the entire data set.

Search for Themes
Collate codes into themes.

Review Themes	
Check if themes work in relation to the entire data set.	Generate a thematic map.

Define and Name Themes	
Refine the specifics of each theme.	Generate clear definitions and names for each theme.

Produce the Report	
Select extracts and examples.	Relate the analysis to RQ and literature.

Figure 1: Phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006)

Familiarizing yourself with your data

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), researchers need to familiarize themselves with their data. This can be done by rereading your data and searching for meanings and patterns.

Generating initial codes

This stage involves making initial codes for your data. Coding can be done manually or with a software program. Because this was done manually for my data, I used different colored highlighters on the texts analyzed. After coding was done, data with similar codes were collated together.

Searching for themes

At this stage, I began to sort the different codes into potential themes. Some codes may form main themes, whereas other codes may be discarded. At this point, I just kept the discarded themes aside in case I might come back to them.

Reviewing themes

This stage involves looking into our themes and breaking them down further. When I review the themes I found from my data, I linked the themes with the review of the readings I had done earlier prior to the research.
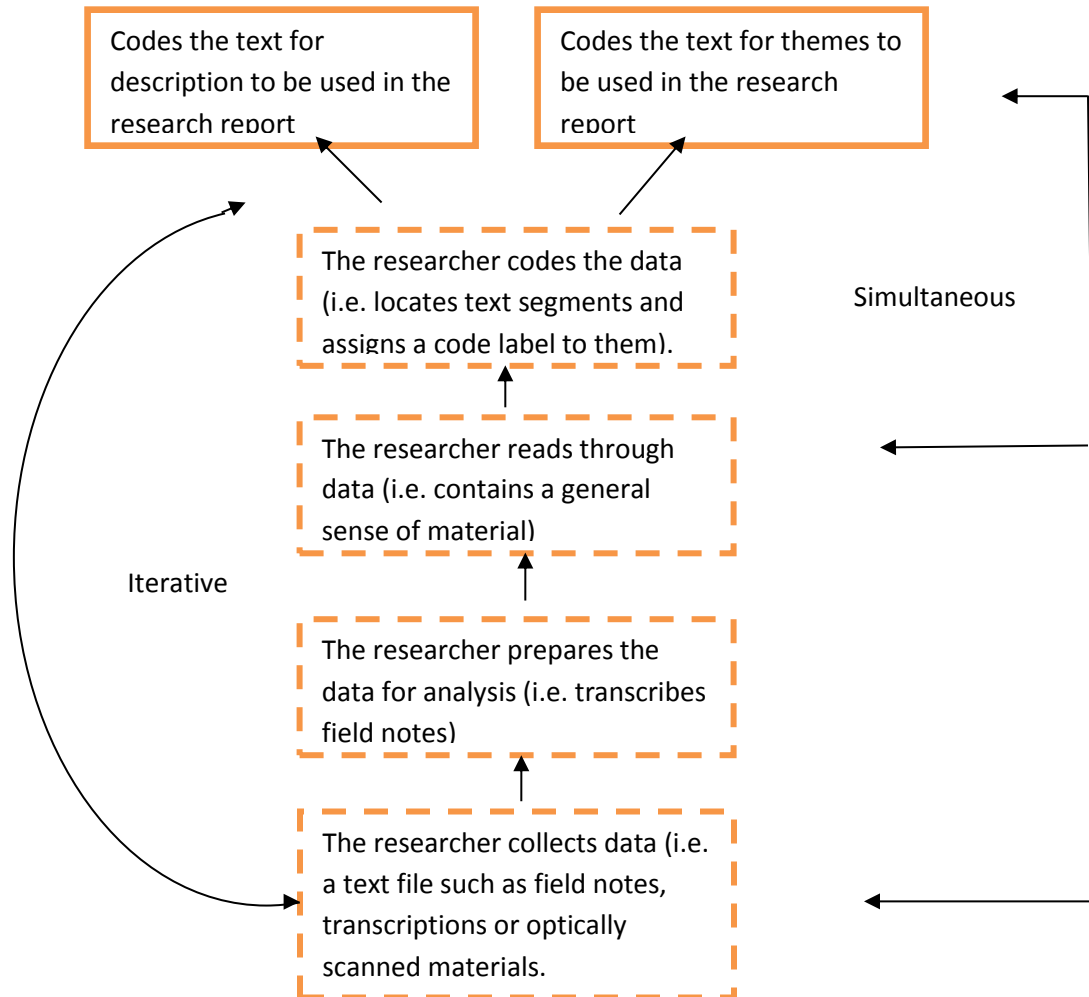
Defining and naming themes

At this point the researcher should be able to label the themes. After reviewing the themes to the data, we can produce a final thematic map..

Producing the report

Once the analysis is done, the report can be written for the audience.

3.   Process of data analysis

The operational framework below illustrated how data were prepared, categorized and analyzed.

Codes the text for description to be used in the research report	Codes the text for themes to be used in the research report

The researcher codes the data (i.e. locates text segments and assigns a code label to them).

Simultaneous

The researcher reads through data (i.e. contains a general sense of material)

Iterative

The researcher prepares the data for analysis (i.e. transcribes field notes)

The researcher collects data (i.e. a text file such as field notes, transcriptions or optically scanned materials.

Figure 2: The qualitative process of data analysis (Creswell, 2012)

As soon as data were collected, the transcriptions of the video-taped lessons and audio-taped interview protocols took place. I started transcribing immediately as the process of transcribing took a long time. After all interviews and video-taping of lessons were transcribed, data were coded. After the data had been coded, I reviewed the transcripts and assigned categories and themes to the transcripts. Then, I counted the frequencies that themes appeared by counting the number of times a code was applied against the text. According to Cresswell (2012), codes refer to labels or specific terms used to denote a section of the transcript.

Because there was several data collection methods used, I gathered data from the individual interviews, the stimulated recall group interviews, my reflective journal, and audio- and video-taped evidence through the organization of the information. This was done through a

categorization of themes. Mertler (2006) referred to this approach as a "coding scheme" (p. 125), where I grouped data that provided a similar kind of information. In addition, the data from the test, field-notes and transcribed data were also reviewed several times, before they were sorted out and coded them into thematic categories (Creswell, 2014).

Thematic analysis is a useful method of analyzing qualitative data. I keep asking myself, "What does the respondent want to say? What does the respondent really mean?' However, the qualitative data is quantified in order to "report truthfully about the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). In this study, a specific theme was counted as it appeared, not only in the interview data, but also in further analysis of video transcriptions, audio transcriptions and journal entries from various participants.

4. Levels of identifying themes
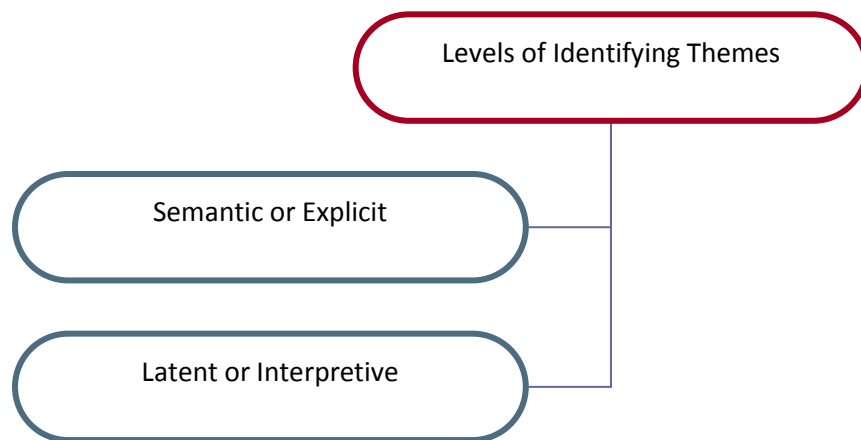
Figure 3: Levels of identifying themes (Braun and Clark, 2006)

In this study, themes that emerged were identified in two ways: at the explicit level, as well as at the interpretive level (see Figure 3). In this case, from across the data set in the interviews, transcriptions and journal entries, I looked for themes that were identified either explicitly or implicitly. Themes which were implicit came from data which I interpreted; meaning they were not voiced out or written by the respondents. Instead, they said something which I made interpretation. For example, in an interview, a participant answered that he "felt good having a class like this". This statement was implicit which I have categorized it as a sign of satisfaction. He further commented that he could mix with other students from different races and different countries which I interpreted as building relationships category. Then I placed the themes side-by-side and categorize them as being the themes or sub-themes based on the research questions. The general quantification of the themes began after the data had been categorized.

The transcribed data were categorized in the first place according to the specific themes that the study addressed. The themes developed were data driven, that is, I worked on all data sets and look for similarities for themes which were continuously repeated across all data sets. The following transcription shows how I extracted the codes and themes from an interview.

Table 1: Motivation as a theme (extract from an interview)

Question	Answer	Codes
What are the changes you like to make to this course?	Time is the best medicine. When we spend more time, we can improve, so the more time you spend, the more you get into it. If the lesser time, if we have a few sessions, we don't get it. Some of them, I notice they haven't get into it. If time more longer, everyone will get used to it.	Intrinsic motivation
What is the positive or negative aspect of this class?	We enjoy. If we enjoy, we loosen ourselves, we break ourselves. We communicate more.	Enjoyment Intrinsic motivation

Along the same lines, while identifying the themes in the stimulated recall interviews, I made notes prior to coding my notes into specific themes. The example below shows how the coding of themes was done.

Table 2: Extracting themes and codes from stimulated-recall interviews (extract from an interview)

Stimulated Recall Interview	My Notes	Codes
T: This session was when you acted as Pak Metih. During this session, what was in your thought? S: I discussed with my group members. Then I saw Pak Metih falling to the ground. I immediately ran to him. My thoughts? I just wanted to save him.	Discussed with team members what they planned to do.	Group Dynamic
T: What words did you plan to use? What about your body language? S: The words I used came out spontaneously. It came out from my mind.	Spoke spontaneously when he was in role.	Competence/ Fluency
T: Did you plan to say anything? S: This is what we discussed. Ali save Pak Metih. Then Ali called the doctor. When the doctor came, Pak Metih died. That's all we discussed. About our language, we didn't discuss what to say. We simply said what we wanted to say.	The group discussed the event that was supposed to take place. They did not discuss the language they were going to use. Every word they uttered was spontaneous.	Competence/ Fluency
T: Why did you suddenly have a mobile phone in your hand? What made u decide to call? S: I wanted to call the doctor. To save Pak Metih. T: Was it your friend who asked you to do it? S: Yeah. We planned. Yeah. But we used our own words. I think it's just nonsense.	All actions were planned by having group discussions.	Group Dynamic

My data were organized and categorized into codes before collating them into the themes that have identified. In doing so, I kept analyzing all my data and tried to make sense of the emerging themes. The codes that I identified from my data were:

Table 3: Codes that emerged from my data

Activity	Attitude	Autonomy	Barriers to learning
Body language	Collaboration	Communication	Confidence
Creativity	Culture	Curriculum	Enjoyment
Experience	Expressiveness	Feelings	Fluency
Foreigners	Future use	Grammar	Group consensus
Group decision making	Importance of communication	Improvement	Intuitive
Involvement	Knowledge	Learning strategy	Motivation
On task	Perspective	Practice	Reflection
Relationship	Repetition	Respect	Satisfaction
Self-awareness	Self-correct	Shared purpose	Stimulated recall interview
Student behaviour	Teacher role	Team work	Visual learning

From my research questions and analysis of the generated codes, I developed themes and related topics were developed as sub-themes. Table 4 portrays the themes that emerged from the data.

Table 4: Themes and sub-themes emerging from the data

Confidence	
Increase in confidence	Factors that promote confidence

Collaborative nature of drama-based activities	
Group dynamics	Relationships
Cooperative learning	Group decision-making

Challenges of learning English	
Environment	Apprehension
Time constraints	Culture
Background knowledge	Language difficulty

Attitudes	
Risk-taking	Willingness to participate
	On task

Improving life skills	
Thinking skills	Drama for future use

Motivation	
Enjoyment	Teaching techniques
Attraction	Atmosphere

5.　　Conclusion

This paper highlighted my experience when processing data using thematic analysis. It gave an overview of thematic analysis and presented examples from my own practice as a means to guide novice researchers through organizing, coding and writing the data.

Acknowledgement

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