Grounded Theory as a Qualitative Research Method

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Abstract

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method. It is growing in popularity for its use in scholarly research works that demand scientific yet flexible study. However, early career researchers often get confused about the theory's proceedings. They are also overwhelmed by the immense data collected in different forms from various sources. This paper explores the grounded theory as a qualitative method along with its definition, essential characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages. Based on the reviews on some available representative literatures, this study analyzes the discourses available on the grounded theory method and explores its constructivist approach in particular and the classical and interpretive grounded theories in general. The findings reveal that grounded theory, especially the constructivist grounded theory with all its essentials, is an emerging qualitative research method having many merits and demerits for the researchers.

Keywords: Grounded theory, constructivist, qualitative research, merits and demerits

Introduction

Grounded Theory is one of the methods being widely used in qualitative studies. It has been one of the prominent qualitative research methods with growing popularity in today's world. It is mainly concerned with inductive method of concept development or theory development (Khan, 2014). Charmaz and Thornberg (2020) also opine that it uses the approach of "abstract understanding" of a phenomenon contributing to the formation of a new theory. This approach helps an inhabitant of a social world to get the meaning of the phenomena happening in the world through his or her own way of seeing. For this purpose, the systematic collection and analysis of the data are needed.

It is widely known that the origin of the grounded theory began with the two American sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss' initiation of it in 1967 with the publication of their book "The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research". Their emphasis in this book was on the collection of the data and their analysis because they thought that the theory would derive from systematically collected and analyzed data. However, the grounded theory propounded by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is now regarded classical. Glaser and Strauss introduced this new qualitative method by turning down the quantitative research frame, which the scientific studies had unilaterally been using, as its alternative (Charmaz, 2008a, p. 464). However, it could not go very far away from positivism, then widely used research paradigm in scientific researches, due to Glaser's attachment with the ideas like rigor, agency, meaning, and action (Charmaz, 2008a, p. 465). Therefore, it was not possible to use this method for qualitative research.

Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin developed another version of Grounded Theory during the 1990's. It became more popular than the previous version by Glaser and Strauss (1967) though it was criticized widely by researchers. Its position moved from positivism to post-positivism because Strauss and Corbin (1990) created a place for the voice of their research participants in this version of Grounded Theory (Khan, 2014). They applied a full scientific process for data collection and verification with all technical procedures. However, they valued the participants' subjective observation along with their objective realities. Nevertheless, they practiced accuracy in the data collection process.

Later, Glaser who was one of the propagators of the classical Grounded Theory criticized this new version as 'usurping' (Charmaz, 2008a, p. 466). He targeted the process of data analysis which was difficult, obligatory, and inappropriate, in this new theory. However, this new theory was a step forward to a thorough understanding of the research method though it was still in incomplete stage. In the days to come, more new generation researchers worked on the grounded theory to further expand it. As a result, the grounded theory at present has three separate applications in the research. According to Sebastian (2019), these types are: 1) Classical Grounded Theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), 2) Interpretive Grounded Theory developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), and 3) Constructivist Grounded Theory developed by Kathy Charmaz (2006).

Among the three varieties of the grounded theory, the constructivist grounded theory developed by Kathy Charmaz (2006) is the scope of this article. This version of the grounded theory that uses constructivist approach is mainly concerned with the "interactive relationship" (Mills et al., 2006, p. 9) between a researcher and his participants. The theory has its relativist ontology and subjective epistemology. The constructivist grounded theory researcher navigates and controls his/her perception carefully while trying to interpret the participants' experiences (Sebastian, 2019, p. 5). In fact, a grounded theory researcher must have abilities to get the concept from the data without showing or having confusion and regression (Khan, 2014). It means the data collected from the participants are often confusing and regressive so that a grounded theory researcher may easily be fed up without being able to properly conceptualize them. Therefore, it is really hectic and challenging to be a constructivist grounded theory researcher. This study aims at easing the process of applying the grounded theory by offering the information on its indispensable features to the prospective researchers.

Literature Review

The grounded theory is a qualitative research method. It is focused on answering the 'why' questions (Charmaz, 2017a) to enhance comprehension of process, meanings, and experiences related to specific phenomena with an objective to explore, derive meaning, and interpret data using various methods, including interviews, observations, films, photographs, and written documents to gather data (Flick, 2014; Given, 2016; Holliday, 2016). This applies to all varieties of the grounded theory.

There are some similarities and some differences among the three varieties of the grounded theory, i. e. classical grounded theory, interpretive grounded theory, and constructivist grounded theory. They are similar in coding, constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and memoing. However, they are different from each other in their use of research paradigm, along with the research objectivity, use of literature, and rigidity and flexibility while analyzing the data (Farell, 2018, p. 57). Therefore, each grounded theory has some nuances with the other grounded theories.

The research paradigm of the classical grounded theory is postpositivist that demands for researchers' objectivity and believes that the discovery of partial truths is possible. On the other hand, the interpretivist grounded theory demands for researchers' subjectivity. It believes that no generalizable knowledge is detectable and the data collected identify and retell the experiences of the particular population. Similarly, the constructivist grounded theory believes that the knowledge is the co-construction between the participants' and researchers' experiences, so the knowledge is constructed, not discovered.

Classical grounded theory has no reliance on theory, literature, or specific type of data. They come to support the emerging theory in later stages of the research process. Interpretive grounded theory uses literature in early stages to frame the study; whereas, the constructivists use literature review at the beginning of the research process, during data collection and after data analysis. Lastly, the order of analysis process differs in all three grounded theories. Classical and Constructivist grounded theories use systematic and flexible data analysis process, alternating between data and analysis (Farell, 2018, p. 58). They focus on the natural emergence of theories. Hence, the interpretive grounded theory depends on forced theoretical findings.

In Annell's (1996) opinion, the grounded theory is rooted in "symbolic interactionism and pragmatism" for it studies individual actions and interactions to focus on the study of the human behavior and develop the theories directly applicable to the real-life situation. Also, by applying the principles of postmodernism, the grounded theory offers a versatile and robust framework for researchers seeking to explore and understand the complexities of social phenomena. For this purpose, Charmaz (2015) argues that the grounded theory has a wide range of tools such as interviewing, coding,

and memo-writing, which essentially help in developing the analytical skills of the researchers.

In grounded theory, qualitative data analysis starts with an inductive approach that emphasizes comparative analysis while integrating data collection and analysis simultaneously (Charmaz, 2017a). The process also involves strategies to refine emerging analytical categories. However, grounded theory extends beyond mere induction. Its iterative and comparative nature continuously refines data collection to strengthen the developing analysis.

In this context, the constructivist grounded theory is a very crucial development in the process of the evolution of the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2017b). Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) builds upon the pragmatist roots of the original grounded theory while redefining its epistemological stance. It situates grounded theory within the social constructionist framework, recognizing data as co-constructed through interactions with research participants. This approach highlights the researcher's active role in shaping both the data and the resulting theories. By emphasizing the interpretive nature of data analysis and the significance of reflexivity, CGT addresses inconsistencies in earlier versions of grounded theory.

Though a number of studies have highlighted the features and process of conducting the grounded theory, they have not explained the merits and demerits of using the grounded theory for the research. Therefore, a novice researcher who wants to apply the grounded theory in his or her research work might be confused or misguided. If they know, beforehand, both the bright and the dark sides of the implementation of the grounded theory in their research, they will be well-prepared for the process and the outcomes of their research. So, this paper will play a supportive role to those researchers in the future.

Method

This paper is focused on Grounded Theory on the whole and Constructivist approach advocated by Kathy Charmaz (1939-2020) in particular. This study aims to provide the prospective researchers in future with a clear guidance on conducting their research with the grounded theory. Therefore, taking the support of some articles and

books, this analysis of the documents on the grounded theory discusses thematically the characteristics of the theory, and the merits and demerits of its use in a research.

In this study, I have sought answers to the questions: a) What are the essential characteristics of the grounded theory? b) What are the merits of grounded theory? and c) What are the demerits of grounded theory? After analyzing the information collected from various sources using the discourse analysis method, I have highlighted the details that can be helpful for clarity and procedure in future researches with the grounded theory method.

Results

Being a qualitative research method, the grounded theory has some essential characteristics that help it stand as a unique and special theory. These characteristics are the theory's modus operandi. Without these characteristics, the grounded theory cannot be suitable for researchers to apply in their research works. These noticeable and unique characteristics of the grounded theory are discussed point by point below.

Inductive Approach

Grounded Theory is based on an inductive approach. This approach focuses on the development of the theories bottom-up, starting with data collection and analysis. It is opposite to the top-down approach, i. e. starting with pre-existing theories or hypotheses. A grounded theory as research has no prior theory or hypothesis to use. Rather, it develops the theory or the hypothesis later on.

Grounded Theory Institute (2014), run by Barney Glaser, has defined the grounded theory as a general method with an inductive approach which can be used both with quantitative and qualitative data. Charmaz (2006, p. 3), on the other hand, defined the grounded theory as a qualitative method. She also further expanded the role of the researcher as constructive (Shindo, 2017, p. 225). Later, Charmaz (2014) defined the grounded theory as a rigorous method for researchers that uses "inductive theoretical analyses" (p. 344). The researchers derive "conceptual frameworks and theories" (ibid) from this kind of analysis. Ultimately, Charmaz (2006 & 2014) contributed to the grounded theory to shift its paradigm from that of Glaser's and Strauss's. In spite of Glaser's positivism and Strauss's post-positivism, Charmaz shifted to constructivism. However, she adopted and continued the inductive approach in her grounded theory.

Emergence of Concepts

The grounded theory emerges from the data and the concepts that are identified during the research process. These concepts are refined and developed through an iterative process of data collection and analysis. While conducting grounded theory research, one-time data collection is not enough. So, the researcher has to keep collecting data again and again.

Since the grounded theory can also generate abstract concepts, it is substantive which can help us to refine the formal theory (Charmaz, 2006, p. 8). The abstract concepts emerge from the codes and they develop into the categories. The themes come up from the categories. According to Charmaz (2008b), the emergence of the concepts is a basic property of the grounded theory (p. 157). This is the main objective of the theory.

Iterative and Recursive Process

The grounded theory is an iterative and recursive process. This means that the researcher has to go back and forth frequently between the data collection and analysis. The data should be constantly refined and revised so that a new theory emerges out of them.

This process of data refinement and revision starts with the inductive inquiry. However, this process does not end in one cycle of refinement and revision. It is because it uses a "comparative, iterative, and interactive" (Charmaz, 2012) method. The early data analysis and the data collection follow an iterative approach so that the middle-range theories can be developed from them.

Constant Comparative Method

The constant comparative method is another key feature of the grounded theory. This method involves the comparison of the data within and across the cases to identify the similarities and the differences. This also aims to develop the categories and the concepts. According to Charmaz (2008a), the grounded theory guidelines include the various comparative research practices, such as comparing the data with the data, labeling the data with the active, specific codes, selecting focused codes, comparing and sorting the data with the focused codes, raising or telling the focused codes to the

tentative analytic categories, comparing the data and the codes with analytic categories, constructing theoretical concepts from the abstract categories, comparing the category with the concept, and comparing the concept and the concept (p. 472). So, the data comparison in the grounded theory takes place at the multiple levels and frequently.

The frequent comparison of the data is an essential feature of the grounded theory. But many student researchers are confused about how it is done. Rennie (2006) has explained in very simple terms how this constant comparative analysis is conducted in the grounded theory. Traditionally, in the grounded theory, the transcript of an interview is taken as a text to find as many codes as possible in it. Each code is compared with another. If two or more than two codes are found to be similar, they are put under the same category. When all the codes have been put into different categories, the researcher mixes and begins the analysis again. This process of reanalyzing and recategorizing of the codes is continued until the possibility of the emergence of a new category is ended.

However, Rennie (2006) preferred an alternative way of comparing the meaning units (MUs) in the text. While doing so, he broke the text into passages or meaning units on the basis of their main ideas. Each MU represented a category and was indexed. All the MUs with repeated idea were put into the same category, and each new idea created a new category. This process continued until there was no new idea to be categorized. Overall, the constant comparative method is a significant feature of grounded theory which is conducted until the saturation of the meaning is achieved.

Open Coding

Open coding is the initial stage of analysis in the grounded theory. It involves the process of breaking down the data into smaller parts and assigning codes to them based on their meaning. Coding the data is one of the prominent analytic strategies of the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2012). The codes are compared with each other, with the data, and with the categories using the comparative methods.

According to Charmaz (2012), coding in grounded theory is "inductive, comparative, interactive, and iterative." The grounded theory coding is done in two aspects. The first is a close coding of statements, actions, events, and documents in which the data are broken into the components or the properties, and the actions related

to the data are defined. The second is the coding with analytic questions in which the data are analyzed, and the significant points are crystalized. These are the 'WH-questions' which prompt the researcher/s to analyze the data.

Theoretical Sampling

The theoretical sampling is the process of selecting the new participants for data collection based on the emerging theory. It is different from the preconceived sampling plan. The theoretical sampling guides a researcher to collect his or her future data in order to analyze and develop categories (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 96-108). Theoretical sampling is a kind of purposive sampling, but it is based on the theoretical concerns of the researcher's analysis. Charmaz (2006) claims that theoretical sampling is the specialty and the major strength of the grounded theory (p. 101). Therefore, the theoretical sampling cannot be ignored or avoided in the grounded theory.

However, most researchers get confused about the theoretical sampling thinking that it is the process of gathering the data until the same pattern reoccurs (Charmaz, 2006, p. 102). They forget or misunderstand that the patterns achieved in this way just reflect the empirical themes, not the theoretical categories. In theoretical sampling, a researcher starts with the data, develops ideas about the data, and examines the ideas in the real worlds of the participants. According to Charmaz (2006), the theoretical sampling is "strategic, specific, and systematic" (p. 103). Memo-writing leads to the theoretical sampling which helps the researcher predict about the place and time for future data collection. More and more writing of the abstract and conceptual memos helps in the process of theoretical sampling.

Charmaz (2006) has enlisted the common objectives of the theoretical sampling such as delineating the properties of a category, checking the curves of the categories, saturating the properties of a category, distinguishing between the categories, clarifying relationships between the emerging categories, and identifying variation in a process of achieving categories (p. 104). The theoretical sampling, which functions to fulfil all these purposes is an indispensable feature of the grounded theory. Undoubtedly, it is the theoretical sampling that helps the grounded theory stand out from other qualitative research methods.

Theoretical Saturation

Theoretical saturation is the stage when a researcher stops collecting data in the grounded theory. At this stage, the researcher considers that s/he has collected enough data for the research. It occurs when the collected data can be used to develop a comprehensive theory that explains the phenomenon under the investigation. The categories are 'saturated' when there is no further aspect of collecting fresh data and developing the new understanding from them. Moreover, the core theoretical categories do not manifest any further qualities (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113). The main aim of the researchers using the grounded theory is to gain this theoretical saturation. However, most of the researchers often show their hastiness in claiming saturation rather than proving it. The research questions set for the study play the vital role in this situation. The ordinary questions bring out the common and unimportant categories which seem saturated so soon.

There are some critics who criticize the idea of theoretical saturation. Dey (1999), for example, prefers using the phrase "theoretical sufficiency" (p. 257) rather than saying theoretical saturation. He thinks that the data do not 'saturate,' but 'suggest' the categories through 'partial,' not 'exhaustive' coding. He also implies that the saturation of the categories will not be as per the expectation of the grounded theorist. Therefore, the idea of theoretical saturation is a controversial issue.

Discussion

The grounded theory has certain merits and demerits of its own for the researcher using it to research an issue. However, the benefits for a researcher out-weigh the challenges or problems of the grounded theory. Therefore, the popularity of the grounded theory has been growing as a prominent qualitative method since its initiation. However, it is not free from controversies. At present, grounded theory has been accepted as an effective method of qualitative research.

The Merits of the Grounded Theory

The grounded theory has certain merits which make it a promisingly attractive method for a qualitative research. The ability of the grounded theory to discover new concepts, its flexibility, its rigor, the rich data used in the theory, its contextualization, and its application to the research practice are some of its merits which this paper discusses further.

Discovery of New Concepts

Most early career researchers find the process of conceptualization during the course of their research very much problematic. In fact, the lack or difficulty of conceptualization is also a big problem for established researchers. In dearth of proper conceptualization, the researchers, in fact, cannot simplify their ideas. They cannot even separate from the body of data what is relevant and what is irrelevant.

According to Glaser (1978), the uniqueness of grounded theory lies in its ability to generate concepts. For this purpose, the theory utilizes the techniques of constant comparison and memo writing. In fact, this process of "concept generation" (ibid, p. 133) is the most exciting thing used in the grounded theory. The researcher reaches to the new level of concepts due to this process. As a result, they can generate the ideas that were never assumed before.

Flexibility

Flexibility is a strength of the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, p. 178). The grounded theory methods are not limited to the attachment with any single method for the collection of the data. The grounded theory is not based on any single epistemology. Actually, the grounded theories are produced when interactions take place between the multiple methods of data collection. Therefore, the grounded theory is a flexible method which can be adapted to a variety of research questions and contexts.

Rigor

Although the grounded theory is a qualitative research method with a lot of flexibility, one of its most prominent characteristics has been its 'rigor' since the initiation of the theory. According to Charmaz (2006), it is an ironic situation that the grounded theory, which was developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s in order to end the dominance of the positivistic quantitative researches, has been well-known for its 'rigor' (p. 9). Rigor is the quality that is strictly maintained in the quantitative methods, but the grounded theory is a qualitative method. Therefore, even quantitative researchers use the grounded theory for its 'rigor' in their projects that use mixed methods.

The grounded theory maintains its 'rigor' by collecting and recollecting the data and analyzing and reanalyzing them frequently (Charmaz, 2006, p. 23). This practice of 'rigor' encourages a researcher to return to the field for further data collection. These newly collected data help the researcher refine the emerging theoretical framework during the process of conducting the grounded theory research.

Rich Data

Another important aspect of the grounded theory is its emphasis upon the collection of the 'rich data'. The rich data are collected via various sources such as fieldnotes, interviews, information in records, and reports. These data help the researchers generate strong grounded theories (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). The grounded theory researchers can elicit the rich data from the interviewee/s in an interview by asking primarily the open questions (Charmaz, 2006, p. 33). Such questions start with 'Wh-words' such as 'who,' 'where,' 'why,' 'when,' 'what,' and 'how'. The question can also start with phrases like 'Tell me about,' 'Discuss,' 'Explain,' etc. The researcher must notice every 'ums' and 'you knows' that come of the mouth of the interviewee/s while collecting the rich data. Even the interviewee's pauses and the duration taken to answer a question yields meanings in the form of rich data.

The rich data provides the researcher with sufficient contextual information about the participants, processes, and setting (Hussein et al., 2014). Since the rich data are the treasure trove of the pieces of important information that are usually hidden and unrevealed openly, they help the researcher to arrive at the new idea through the process of data comparison. Therefore, the rich data are a very important component that the researchers of the grounded theory benefits from.

Contextualization

The contextualization is another important aspect of the grounded theory which uses the understanding of the social and cultural context of the research. Charmaz (2014) highlighted the importance of contextualization, i. e. understanding the social and cultural context of the research work, in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs (p. 23). The contextualization helps the researchers to sensitize the concepts of the research work like power, global reach, and difference by the use of inductive analyses that help them to connect between the local worlds and the larger social structures (Charmaz, 2006, p. 133). While contextualizing in the grounded theory research, the scope of theoretical concepts is broadened via inductive analytical process to effectively utilize the context in which the participants are located (Nunes et al., 2010).

The grounded theory even requires an interview to be contextual and negotiated (Charmaz, 2006, p. 28). An interview cannot simply be neutral just by asking neutral questions. The impressions of the interviewer and the interviewee on a particular situation construct the reality of the research work. Not only the power and professional status but also gender, race, and age may affect the direction and the content of the interviews. Thus, the use of contextualized information increases the rigor of the grounded theory with the increase in its dependability and truthfulness as a research work.

Application to Practice

Although the grounded theory is a qualitative method, practicability is its well-known feature. The grounded theory gives its emphasis on practices and actions. The reality is not explained but constructed through the social interactions. These interactions are depicted by the actions and words of the participants and the researcher's interpretation of them. So, the multiple realities in the grounded theory are situated in particular positions, perspectives, and experiences of the parties involved in the research process.

The Demerits of the Grounded Theory

The grounded theory has also some lapses, but these disadvantages of the grounded theory are outnumbered to its advantages**.** However, they cannot be undermined. The main disadvantages or the demerits of the grounded theory are discussed in this paper under different headings such as 'lack of generalizability,' 'time-consuming,' 'requires expertise,' 'potential for researcher's bias,' and 'lack of structure'.

Lack of Generalizability

The grounded theory emphasizes on the importance of the specific context and the unique nature of each research setting. It can make the grounded theory difficult to generalize the findings to other contexts. Bryant (2017) observed that the grounded theories have the limitation in their range and generalizability (p. 349). Due to this limitation, the grounded theories cannot be taken in terms of 'truthfulness' (Bryant, 2017, p. 349). His opinion reflects the lack of stability of meaning with the overall acceptance in the grounded theory.

However, Hood (2007) thought that a researcher's focus in the grounded theory research is to generalize the formal theory rather than generalizing specific substantive findings (p. 162). This practice helps the researchers to use the grounded theory in various settings. To induct a theory, the grounded theory researcher extends theoretical sampling and uses the constant comparison method.

Time-Consuming

The grounded theory can also be a time-consuming method. Particularly in the early stages of data analysis, the grounded theory can be a great challenge for the researchers who work with a limited time frame (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Therefore, a novice researcher may find the grounded theory method unmanageable and hectic.

Moreover, the coding process in the grounded theory is not only time-consuming but also tiring and laborious (Hussein et al., 2014). It is not easy to abstract and encompass the concepts in the grounded theory. So, the researcher may not discover the ideas and the themes that emerge from the data collected in the grounded theory. It's because the activity of coding is an overwhelming process in the grounded theory.

Requires Expertise

The grounded theory is a qualitative research method that involves the systematic collection and analysis of data to generate a new theory or theories. As an inductive approach, the grounded theory focuses on discovering and developing concepts and theories from the data rather than testing the pre-existing hypotheses. Therefore, the grounded theory demands a significant level of expertise from the researchers because it involves a rigorous and iterative process of data collection and analysis. The researchers using the grounded theory must have thoroughly understood the principles and techniques of the qualitative research. Not only that, the researchers must also know the specific steps that the grounded theory involves in its research process. Moreover, the researchers of the grounded theory must also have the ability to manage and analyze large amounts of data, to identify their patterns and themes, and to develop a theory that accurately represents the data.

In addition to the technical expertise, the researchers who are using the grounded theory must also have good communication skills and writing skills. They will need these skills to explain their findings clearly and to present these findings and theories to other people. The researchers should also have a strong understanding of the research context in which the research is being conducted. In the grounded theory, the research context can influence the interpretation of the data.

Potential for the Researcher's Bias

The grounded theory relies heavily on the researcher's interpretations of the data. The data interpretation can be influenced by the researchers' own biases and assumptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 30). Therefore, keeping the data analysis impartial from the researcher's self is a big challenge that every grounded theory researcher has to face.

Lack of the Structure

The grounded theory is a relatively unstructured methodology. Therefore, using the theory in their research works can create a big challenge for the researchers. The grounded theory allows the researchers to develop a new theory from the observation of the raw data (Shindo, 2017, pp. 224-225). In contrast to this, the other research methods use a framework or theory that is predefined to guide the process of the data collection and analysis.

This lack of structure is both the strength and the weakness of the grounded theory as a research method. On the one hand, the structureless nature of the grounded theory allows the researchers to explore the data without any preconceived notions or biases. The data thus explored help the researchers to develop a theory that is grounded rather than to explore among the pre-existing ideas or theories (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2018). This situation can lead to the rich and the nuanced findings that the researchers might not have discovered using other research methods.

On the other hand, the lack of the structure can also make the process of data collection and analysis more challenging for the grounded theory researchers. Without a predefined framework or theory, the grounded theory researchers must rely on their own judgment to determine which data are relevant. The grounded theory researchers will also have to categorize and analyze the data on their own. As a result, the data analysis

is affected by the situation of ambiguity. The analysis of the data will be subjective which adds to the level of difficulty for other researchers in replicating the study or evaluating the research findings (Khan, 2014). However, the grounded theory has a way out of this problem.

To address this challenge, the grounded theory researchers often use coding and memoing techniques for organizing and analyzing the data in a more systematic and rigorous way. These techniques can help the grounded theory researchers to ensure that the analysis is grounded in the data even in the absence of a predefined framework or theory.

Conclusion

The popularity of the grounded theory has been growing continuously. It has now been a prominent qualitative method of research in various fields of knowledge production. Glaser and Strauss (1967) initiated this research method in protest to the then dominant quantitative method. Therefore, grounded theory shifted its paradigm from positivism to post-positivism. Now, as its latest development, the grounded theory has even opted the constructivist paradigm.

Strauss and Corbin's (1990) version of the grounded theory not only stressed on the accuracy of the collected data through scientific process but also valued the participants' subjective observation along with their objective realities. Charmaz (2006) gave it a constructive shape with the "interactive relationship" (Mills et al., 2006, p. 9) between the researchers and their research participants.

The grounded theory is separate from other qualitative methods because of its special characteristics. The inductive approach, the emergence of the concepts, the iterative and recursive process, the constant comparative method, the open coding, the theoretical sampling, and the theoretical saturation are these characteristics. The grounded theory's lack of generalizability, its time-consuming nature, its need for a lot of expertise, its potentiality for the researcher bias, and its lack of the proper structure are its main disadvantages which may create a big problem to the early career researchers. However, it is beneficial to a researcher with its tendency to discover new concepts, its flexibility, its rigor, its use of the rich data, its contextualization, and its application to the practice.

A Critical Appreciation of "Constructivist Grounded Theory Practice in Accountability Research" as a Grounded Theory Research Paper

The research paper "Constructivist Grounded Theory Practice in Accountability Research" (Khanal, 2018) used in this critical analysis was published in the Journal of Education and Research, volume 8, no. 1, in March 2018. It presents a typical example of how the Constructivist Grounded Theory developed by Kathy Charmaz (2006; 2014) can be applied for research works. While drawing empirical evidence from the author's study conducted in the context of community schools in Nepal, the paper discusses the prominent cannons of grounded theory in reference to inquiring the issue of accountability in the service delivery of education. The author presents his example of how he achieved the constructivist grounded epistemology in the issue he investigated.

In the Introduction section of the article, the author has provided a detailed introduction to the grounded theory. The author discusses that the grounded theory utilizes the methods of induction, abduction, and deduction for the systematic inquiry. While demonstrating his wide study on various sources to trace the history and development of all three varieties of grounded theory – classical, post-positivist, and constructivist – the author has focused on the last, i. e. constructivist grounded theory propagated by Kathy Charmaz. He has highlighted all the special features of the theory with examples from his own study. Therefore, it is exemplary and guiding for those novice researchers who know somewhat about the grounded theory but does not know how actually s/he can apply that knowledge in practicality. The author has shown how knowledge is constructed out of the dynamic interaction between the researcher, participants, and the context using CGT (Constructivist Grounded Theory).

The author has mentioned in the Methodology section of the article that he conducted the research from 2016 to 2018 in two community schools of Nepal. With an aim to explore the issue "What it means to be accountable for school heads for service delivery in school". He collected the data via open interviews, observation, and document study. His research participants were the headteacher, teachers, students, parents, and School Management Committee members.

In the research paper, the author has first discussed CGT with its strategies, contradictions, and similarities with the previous versions. Then, he has discussed the application of CGT strategies in his research context. Next, he has argued that

theorizing in CGT is accomplished through the interaction of the field-based data-indicated theoretical concepts and the extant theoretical concepts. So, even a novice, who has a little knowledge of CGT, benefits a lot with the wide review of literature the author has used in his paper.

The main argument of the author throughout his article seems to be that the data saturation in constructive grounded theory depends only on the level of the researcher's satisfaction when s/he stops collecting more data. For this, the author has presented his own study as an example. He first conducted interview sessions with memo-writing, and arrived at 89 open codes. He developed 22 interrelated categories from those codes. He achieved a few emerging concepts from those categories. Using theoretical sampling, he verified these initial concepts against further data in the following episodes. For that, he selected other data-rich or resourceful participants to address the emerging issues or categories. He interviewed the Chief District Officer, and wrote an analytic memo for further episode of the data collection. He got 12 open codes and 9 categories from the data. Then, he compared and combined the previous categories and concepts emerged in the first episode, and arrived at a cumulative list of 23 categories and concepts. Not only that, he also interviewed a headteacher of a school which was in a sub-urban area and was running well despite having limited sources. This process continued until the author was satisfied with the data, and he no more wished to add more information. This presents a very sound example of how a grounded theorist conducts theoretical sampling.

The author has also elaborated how he conducted coding and categorization procedure. He was involved in the three phases of coding throughout his research: initial (open coding), focused (axial coding), and selective (theoretical coding). After interview and observation, he transcribed the data from which he received 22 codes and 12 categories. These categories and concepts were refined and adjusted against cumulative categories as a result of which he arrived at 56 cumulative categories and 64 concepts. He got 26 focused codes from comparing these cumulative categories to data, and categories to codes. He finally received six theoretical codes. The author also wrote analytic memo and conducted constant comparative analysis between the data of one episode to another to find the similarities and differences of the concepts. During the process, he moved back and forth between the data to codes, codes to categories, and

categories to data to verify and test the hypothesis generated through inductive, abductive and deductive reasoning which are the three fundamental forms of references in grounded theory research.

After all, the author has also given a sample of theoretical coding and an analytic memo each in its appendix section. In this way, this article by Khanal (2018) has been a typical example of a research article which used constructivist grounded theory in its inquiry of the issue.

In conclusion, the present paper has been able to present itself as an example of how Constructivist Grounded Theory can be employed for research with its full guidelines even for a novice researcher how it can be conducted step-by-step. Moreover, the two samples of theoretical coding and analytical memo included in the appendix section have made this paper exemplary for any future grounded theory researcher.

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