

Understanding Lived Experience Through Thematic Analysis

In International Social Work

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For more details or permission inquiry to use any information about this study please contact Dr. Ouedraogo at ouedraogov@macewan.ca

Background of the Study

Research Title

International Educational
Exchange Program:
Experiences and Lessons
Learned from the
Perspectives of the Social
Work Exchange Program
between Canada and
Germany.

Main Research Question

How do social work
students use
international exchange
experiences to inform
local practice?

Data Collection

- Narrative interviews
- Used WebEx
- Recorded and transcribed verbatim into text
- REB approval #101888

Definitions

International Social Work

International social work is a field that integrates global and local perspectives to address social issues, emphasizing human rights, social justice, and the importance of cultural and contextual differences in practice.

(Ouedraogo & Wedler, 2019)

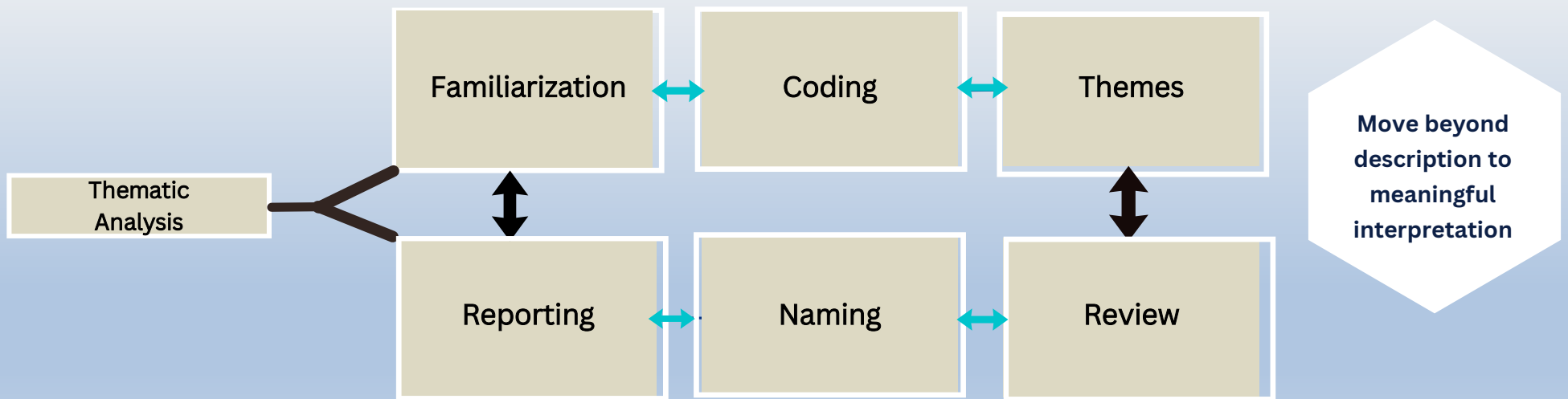
Lived Experience

Lived experience is an interpretive (hermeneutic) approach that examines how individuals understand and give meaning to their experiences within their social, historical, and cultural context.

It focuses on how reality is experienced as meaningful rather than just describing events.

(Smith, 2025)

Research Methodology



(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Research Methodology (cont'd)

Thematic analysis provides a structured yet flexible approach to identifying patterns and constructing meaning within qualitative data.

Themes are not discovered-they are developed through interpretation.

Why it matters:

Allows exploration of patterns across experiences

Supports interpretation of meaning, not just description

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Analyzing the Interview Transcripts

- 01
 - Narrative accounts with rich personal reflections
 - Detailed personal stories
 - Emotionally and culturally grounded experiences

- 02 Contextualized experiences: cultural, social, personal realities

- 03 Lived experience accessed via participants' narratives

(Barrel, 2020)

From Data to Meaning

- Three (3) interview Transcripts
- Immersion in transcripts to develop familiarity
- Analysis and making sense of information gained through the transcripts
- Iterative and interpretive process

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Experiential Learning Through Analysis

- Developed analytical thinking skills through direct engagement
- Gained understanding of thematic analysis as an applied method
- Knowledge built through doing and reading
- Ability to interpret complex narratives
- Deeper engagement with research practice

(Morris, 2020)

Challenges in Engaging with Thematic Analysis

- Initial difficulty in understanding steps
- Intensive reading and re-reading of transcripts
- Learning to interpret, not just summarize narratives
- Time-consuming but essential for skill development.

However, continuous guidance and mentorship with Dr. Ouedraogo helped.



Whose Experiences Become Knowledge?

- Lived experiences are interpreted, shaped, and given meaning within context

Positioning my perspective:

- Cross-cultural lived experience (Africa → Canada)
- Nursing education grounded in evidence-based practice
- Engagement in qualitative research within social work

Critical reflection:

How does my positionality influence what is interpreted as meaningful?

Reflexivity

- Reflexivity involves critically examining my positionality, assumptions, and influence during the interpretation of interview data.
- Guided by lived experience, the analysis focused on how participants made meaning within their social and cultural contexts (Smith, 2025).
- An Afrocentric perspective further informed the analysis by centering cultural identity, values, and ways of knowing relevant to participants (Reviere, 2001).
- This process ensured that interpretations remained context-sensitive, culturally grounded, and ethically representative (Reviere, 2001).

Lessons Learned

While engaging with thematic analysis, I learnt to:

- 01 Respect participants' voices

- 02 Avoid misrepresentation

- 03 Interpret with sensitivity to context

- 04 Avoid imposing assumptions on participants' experiences

- 05 Sustain authenticity and curiosity in using the methodology language

Conclusion

- Knowledge in qualitative research is constructed through interpretation
- Context and reflexivity shape meaning
- Engage deeply to understand lived experience
- Move beyond surface understanding of experiences
- Engage critically with meaning and context

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THANK you