



Narrative Research & Grounded Theory Research Design

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ABSTRACT

Qualitative research is an approach that aims to understand social reality, human behavior, and the meaning contained in it through the perspective of the subject under study. In contrast to quantitative research which emphasizes numbers and generalizations, qualitative research prioritizes depth of understanding and interpretation of meaning. In qualitative research, there are various designs that can be used, including Narrative Research and Grounded Theory which are often the main choices for researchers who want to explore complex phenomena. Narrative Research focuses on stories or narratives told by individuals, with the aim of uncovering personal meaning, life experiences, and a person's subjective interpretation of the events they experience. Through this approach, researchers seek to understand how individuals make meaning of their lives, and how these experiences shape their identities and behaviors. Meanwhile, Grounded Theory aims to build theories that are truly born from field data through an inductive approach. Researchers collect data without bringing an initial theory and gradually form categories, concepts, until finally producing a theory that can explain the phenomenon under study. This process involves iterative data collection and analysis through open, axial and selective coding techniques. This article not only discusses the definitions and characteristics of the two designs, but also reviews the types of research, distinctive features, advantages, essential differences, and challenges that may be faced in their application. These challenges include the difficulty in obtaining authentic narratives, the potential for researcher subjectivity, and the complexity of the theory development process. This article is organized through a literature study and descriptive analysis that aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how and when Narrative Research and Grounded Theory can be appropriately applied in qualitative research.

1. INTRODUCTION

Definition and characteristics of Narrative Research

According to Clandinin and Conelly, narrative research is a research strategy in which researchers investigate the lives of individuals and ask a person or group of individuals to tell their lives. This information is then retold by the researcher in a narrative chronology. ([The Syahril, 2017](#)) At the end of the research stage, the researcher must combine in narrative style his views on the lives of the participants with his views on the researcher's own life. ([Jhon W.](#)

[Creswell, 2013](#)) Narrative research is widely used in the social sciences. The essence of this research method is its ability to understand a person's identity and worldview by referring to the stories he or she hears or tells every day. Narrative research is the study of stories. In some cases, stories can appear as historical records, as fictional novels, as fairy tales, as autobiographies, and other genres. Stories are written through the process of listening to others or meeting directly with the actors through interviews. The study of stories is carried out in various scientific disciplines, including literary criticism, history, philosophy, organizational theory, and social science. In the social sciences, stories are studied by anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and educators. ([Surayya, 2018](#))

Narrative research takes many forms and has its roots in different disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. Narrative can mean the term given to a particular text or discourse, or a text used in the context or form of inquiry in qualitative research. Narrative is understood as a written or spoken text that provides an account of an event, incident or series of incidents, and a series of events that are connected chronologically. ([Rukminingsih, 2020](#))

So, it can be concluded that Narrative Research is a qualitative research method that focuses on individual experiences told in narrative form. This research aims to understand how someone interprets the events they experience in their lives. ([Moleong, L.J, 2017](#)), Through this approach, researchers try to explore the deeper meaning of participants' subjective experiences and how they form their identities and understand the world around them. ([Sugiyono, 2019](#)).

This approach is widely used in various fields such as education, psychology, and sociology because it is able to reveal human experiences in a more personal and contextual way. However, Narrative Research has its own challenges, such as high data subjectivity and potential bias in the interpretation of stories told by participants. Therefore, researchers need to ensure the validity and accuracy of the data through triangulation and critical reflection on the research process. ([S. Nasution, 2018](#))

Characteristics of Narrative Research

1. Narrative research focuses on individual experiences and their chronology.
2. Narrative research uses restorying techniques to construct a collection of narratives based on data collected through interviews.
3. Narrative research combines context and place in the story.
4. Narrative construction always involves responding to the question, "Then what happened?"

Rukminingsih, Gunawan Adnan, Mohammad Adnan Latief

One of the key characteristics that stands out in Narrative research is that there are seven:

a) Individual experience

Narrative researchers focus on the experiences of one or more individuals. Narrative research focuses on understanding an individual's past experiences and how those experiences contribute to present and future experiences.

b) Chronology of experience

Understanding an individual's past as well as their present and future is a key element in narrative research. Narrative researchers analyze a chronology and report on an individual's experiences. The chronology referred to in narrative research is that researchers analyze and write about an individual's life using a time sequence according to the chronology of events.

([Rio Luthfiandana, 2024](#))

c) Story collection.

Researchers put emphasis on collecting stories told by individuals to them or collected from various field texts. who say or tell. Stories usually have a beginning, middle and end.

([Ancient, 2025](#))

d) Restoring.

The stories of individual experiences told to the researcher are retold in the researcher's own words. The researcher does this to connect and sequence them. Restorying is the process by

which the researcher collects stories, analyze it by key story elements (time, place, plot and scene) and then rewrite the story to put it in chronological order. ([No, 2017](#))

e) Coding the theme.

Narrative researchers can code stories or data into themes or categories. Identifying themes adds complexity to a story and adds depth to explaining an individual's understanding of their experiences. Researchers combine themes into sentences about individual stories or include them as separate sections in a study. ([Mustaqim, 2013](#))

f) Collaboration.

Researchers and participants collaborate throughout the research process. Collaboration in narrative research is where researchers actively involve their participants in examining the stories that are revealed or developed. Collaboration can involve several stages in the research process from formulating the central phenomenon to determining the types of field texts that are will produce useful information for writing individual experience story reports. ([Jelahun, 2022](#))

Understanding and Characteristics of Grounded Theory

Grounded research is a type of research that does not start from theory, but starts from factual field data. The data is processed into a theory based on deductive thinking methods. Grounded research from the empirical world, not from conceptual and abstract things, because grounded research emphasizes the birth of theories based on empirical data and social reality. ([Warul Walidin, Saifullah, and Tabrani, 2015](#)).

Grounded theory is a systematic qualitative research procedure, in which researchers a theory that explains concepts, processes, actions, or interactions regarding a topic at a broad conceptual level. As the name suggests, the purpose of the Grounded Theory Approach is theorizing data. Theorizing is a method of compiling a theory that is oriented towards action/interaction; therefore, it is suitable for use in behavioral research. This research does not start from a theory or to test a theory (like the quantitative research paradigm), but rather starts from data towards a theory. For that purpose, what is needed in the process towards the theory is a planned and orderly (systematic) procedure. ([Burck, 2005](#)) The grounded theory approach constructs theories based on (empirical) field data, for the following reasons:

1. No a priori theory is capable of encompassing the diverse realities of human life;
2. The researcher as a research instrument knows exactly what is happening in the field and he believes what he sees, therefore the researcher should optimally be neutral;
3. Grounded theory is more responsive or more appropriate to contextual values.

One of the objectives of the grounded theory method is to formulate a theory based on conceptual ideas. In addition, it tries to verify the resulting theory by comparing data conceptualized at different levels of abstraction, and this comparison contains deductive steps. Another objective of the grounded theory method is to find the main concerns of researchers and how they continue to try to complete their research.

This research design was first developed in 1967 by two researchers, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, who felt that the theories used in a study were often not appropriate for all participants. The grounded theory approach, constructs a theory based on field (empirical) data, for the following reasons: Strauss, ([Asbui, 2024](#)).

1. There isn't any a priori theory that is able to encompass different realities in human life,
2. Researchers as research instruments know exactly what is happening in the field and researchers also believe what they see, so that researchers act as neutrally as possible.

This method was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 and emphasizes inductive analysis where the theory does not come from existing hypotheses, but from empirical findings during the research process. Researchers collect and analyze data simultaneously through the process of coding, comparative analysis, and theoretical sampling, allowing the resulting theory to be flexible and can develop along with the data obtained. ([Gunawan, I, 2016](#)).

The main goal of grounded theory is to expand the explanation of a phenomenon by identifying key elements of that phenomenon, and then categorizing the relationships of those elements to the context and process of the experiment. In other words, the goal is to go from the general to the specific without losing sight of what makes the subject of study unique.

So, it can be said that the purpose of the grounded theory method in qualitative research is data theorization, namely as a method of compiling a theory that focuses on action or interaction so that it is suitable for use in behavioral research. Qualitative research with the grounded theory method starts from data to achieve a theory and not from theory or to test a theory, so that in this grounded theory research, various systematic and well-planned procedures or steps are needed.

From the explanations above, it can be concluded that grounded theory is something that is conceptual or theoretical as a result of inductive thinking from data generated in research on a phenomenon. Or a theory that is built from data on a phenomenon and analyzed inductively, not the result of testing existing theories. To analyze data inductively, theoretical sensitivity is required. ([Suyitno, 2021](#))

Characteristics of Grounded Theory

1. Suitable (fit), namely if the theory produced matches everyday reality according to the field being researched; Understandable (understanding), namely if the theory produced describes reality and is comprehensive, so that it can be understood by the individuals being researched and by the researcher;
2. Generality, namely when the theory produced covers various fields so that it can be applied to phenomena in various contexts;
3. Control, namely when the theory produced contains hypotheses that can be used in systematic guiding activities to collect actual data that is only related to related phenomena.

Characteristics of Narrative Research and Grounded Theory

Characteristics of Narrative Research

The characteristics of Narrative Research are as follows: ([Afan Faizin and Haerussaleh, 2020](#)).

- a. Focus: Exploring the life of a person/individual
- b. Problem Type: Tells the characteristics of individual experiences
- c. Disciplinary background: Humanities, anthropology, literature, history, psychology, and sociology
- d. Unit of analysis: Studying one or more individuals
- e. Forms of data collection: Interviews and documents
- f. Data analysis strategies: Analyzing data for stories, retelling, developing themes using chronology
- g. Written report: Developing a narrative about an individual's life
Identifying narrative segments
Identifying patterns of meaning (events, processes, epiphanies (consciousness, intuitive perceptions, themes)

So, simply put, Narrative Research is research that involves listening to other people's stories, understanding their meaning, and then restructuring them into a meaningful narrative.

1. Characteristics of Grounded Theory

The characteristics of grounded theory are as follows:

- a. *Grounded theory* built from data about a phenomenon, not a result of developing an existing theory.
- b. The compilation of the theory is done by analyzing data inductively, not deductively, like data analysis carried out in quantitative research. So that the compilation of the theory produces a correct theory besides

- c. In order for the development of a theory to produce a correct theory, in addition to having to fulfill 4 (four) criteria, namely: fit, understanding, generality, control, it is also necessary for the researcher to have theoretical sensitivity.
- d. The researcher's ability to give meaning to data is greatly influenced by the depth of theoretical knowledge, experience and research from relevant fields and the amount of literature read. These things cause the researcher to have rich and sensitive information or sensitive to events and incidents in the phenomena being studied.

So, in simple terms, Grounded Theory is a research method that finds new theories directly from data in the field, not from previously existing theories.

Differences between Narrative Research and Grounded Theory

The main differences can be divided into several aspects, namely:

1. Research purposes
Narrative Research: Aims to explore and understand individuals' experiences through the stories or narratives they tell. The focus is on how individuals construct meaning from their experiences in a particular context.
Grounded Theory: Aims to develop theories that emerge directly from empirical data. This research focuses on the process of systematically collecting and analyzing data to produce theories that are "rooted" in the data.
2. Data Analysis Approach
Narrative Research: Using narrative analysis that focuses on story structure, themes, and the socio-cultural context of the narratives conveyed by participants.
Grounded Theory: Using an open, axial, and selective data coding process to identify categories and relationships between categories, with the goal of building consistent and comprehensive theory.
3. Data collection
Narrative Research: Data is collected through in-depth interviews, analysis of autobiographies, diaries, or other personal documents that allow participants to recount their experiences in detail.
Grounded Theory: Data was collected through various methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, with the data collection and analysis process taking place simultaneously until theoretical saturation was achieved.
4. Research result
Narrative Research: Produces in-depth descriptions of individual experiences in the form of narratives that are rich in detail and context.
Grounded Theory: Produce conceptual theories that can be used to understand and explain certain social phenomena more broadly.

Challenges of Narrative Research and Grounded Theory

Narrative Research Challenges

Narrative Research is qualitative research method that focuses on collecting and analyzing stories or narratives from participants. Although Narrative Research has several advantages, such as allowing researchers to understand the experiences and meanings given by participants, it also has several challenges, namely:

1. Difficulty in collecting accurate and complete data
In *Narrative Research*, researchers must collect accurate and complete data from participants. However, participants may not always be able to provide accurate and complete information, especially if they have had traumatic or sensitive experiences.
2. Difficulty in analyzing complex and diverse data

The data collected in Narrative Research can be very complex and varied, requiring very thorough and careful analysis. However, analyzing complex and diverse data can take a long time and require a high level of expertise.

3. Difficulty in ensuring the validity and reliability of research results

In *Narrative Research*, researchers must ensure that the research results obtained are valid and reliable. However, ensuring the validity and reliability of research results can take a long time and require high expertise.

4. Difficulty in communicating research results to diverse audiences

In Narrative Research, researchers must communicate research results to diverse audiences, including academics, practitioners, and the general public. However, communicating research results to diverse audiences can require high expertise and take a long time.

5. Difficulty in overcoming biases and assumptions

In Narrative Research, researchers must overcome biases and assumptions that can affect the results of the study. However, overcoming biases and assumptions can take a long time and require high expertise.

Grounded Theory Challenges

Grounded theory is a form of qualitative research where researchers need to set aside theoretical ideas or understandings so that later analytical substantive theories can emerge. The approach using grounded theory studies is inductive and developing so that this is a systematic research approach with specific steps in data analysis.

In perspective ([Corbin and Strauss, 2007](#)), researchers will face difficulties in determining when categories are saturated/ when theories can be detailed, so this approach allows some qualitative researchers to not have the flexibility as expected. There is one strategy used to move towards fulfillment (saturation), namely Discriminant Sampling.

Where the researcher collects additional information from different individuals or groups than previously interviewed and then determines whether the theory remains true for these additional participants. The main outcome of this study is a theory of specific components, these specific components are categories of information that have been established in the theory, for example: central phenomena, casual conditions, strategies, conditions and contexts, and consequences.

In this case, the perspective is more adaptable and less rigid and can therefore be used. Some other challenges are:

1. Complex Data Collection and Analysis Process: Data is collected and analyzed simultaneously, requiring high flexibility and interpretive skills.
2. Difficulty in Reaching Data Saturation: Researchers must continue collecting data until no new information emerges, which often takes a long time. ([Santosa, H. 2020](#)).
3. Subjectivity in Coding: The coding process (open, axial, selective) is dependent on the researcher's interpretation, so potential bias may arise.

Requirement of Large Time and Resources: Compared to other methods, Grounded Theory requires more time and effort because data analysis is carried out continuously until saturation is reached ([Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, 2009](#)).

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a library research approach, which is a qualitative method that aims to collect, review, and analyze information sourced from various written references in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Narrative Research and Grounded Theory research designs. Library research was chosen because the nature of this study is conceptual and theoretical, so it does not require primary data collection from the field. Secondary data was collected from scientific books, accredited journal articles, theses, dissertations, and various other reliable sources that discuss in depth the basic concepts, philosophical backgrounds, data

collection and analysis techniques, to the advantages, limitations, and challenges of each research approach. The literature was selected purposively based on the criteria of relevance, recency, and academic authority to ensure the accuracy and depth of the information obtained.

In its implementation, researchers first identify the main issues to be studied, then group the references into several central themes, such as the definition, methodological characteristics, purpose of use, and form of application of Narrative Research and Grounded Theory in qualitative research. Furthermore, a descriptive analysis is carried out on the contents of the references that have been collected, where researchers compare the contents between literatures, identify similarities and differences, and draw temporary conclusions from the results of critical reading. This process is continued with the synthesis of information to form a complete, comprehensive, and balanced understanding, which not only explains the advantages and limitations of each design, but also provides practical considerations for researchers in choosing an approach that suits their research objectives.

With this method, researchers are not only able to present a solid theoretical framework, but also contribute to expanding academic insight related to the dynamics of using two qualitative designs that are widely used in various fields of social sciences, education, psychology, and health. Literature study as a methodological approach in this article also emphasizes the importance of a strong conceptual foundation before an approach is applied practically in field research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the literature review conducted, it was found that Narrative Research and Grounded Theory are two qualitative research designs that have different characteristics, objectives, and methodological approaches but complement each other. The main differences between these two approaches lie in the focus of the research, data analysis strategies, and the outputs or results expected from the research process.

Narrative Research is an approach that focuses on the subjective experience of individuals. This research aims to reveal the meaning of a person's life experience through the stories or narratives they tell. In this approach, data is collected through in-depth interviews, autobiographies, diaries, and other personal documents. Researchers play an important role in the process of "restorying" or reorganizing participants' stories into a complete, chronological, and meaningful narrative. The analysis process in Narrative Research is more interpretive and contextual, because it seeks to understand how a person gives meaning to the events they experience. Therefore, this approach is widely used in educational, psychological, and sociological research, which requires a deep understanding of individual subjectivity and identity.

On the other hand, Grounded Theory aims to build theory from below, namely from empirical data collected systematically in the field. The resulting theory is inductive and not based on pre-existing theories. The data collection process is carried out simultaneously with data analysis through techniques such as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Grounded Theory is very useful when researchers want to understand social processes, actions, or interactions in a particular context, and produce theories that are able to explain the dynamics that occur broadly and are applicable. This approach is often used in the fields of sociology, nursing, management, and policy studies.

Methodologically, Narrative Research is exploratory and focuses on individual narratives, while Grounded Theory is more systematic and focuses on creating theories that encompass conceptual categories. Narrative Research provides the power to explore the depths of human experience, but is susceptible to subjective bias. Meanwhile, Grounded Theory offers a more rigorous and structured approach, but requires complex analytical skills and a long time to reach data saturation (theoretical saturation).

The main challenges in Narrative Research include the difficulty of obtaining complete and in-depth narratives from participants, and the complexity of maintaining the validity of narrative interpretations. On the other hand, the challenges in Grounded Theory lie in the simultaneous data collection and analysis process, the demand to postpone the use of existing theories, and the difficulty in determining when the coding process can be said to be sufficient to form a complete and comprehensive theory.

Thus, the results of this study indicate that the choice of design between Narrative Research and Grounded Theory must consider the purpose of the study, the type of questions asked, and the context of the phenomenon being studied. Narrative Research is more appropriate when the focus of the study is on the exploration of personal experiences and individual subjectivity. In contrast, Grounded Theory is more appropriate when the study aims to build a conceptual theory based on complex social processes that have not been widely explained by previous theories.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Qualitative with a different approach, Narrative Research focuses on individual experiences packaged in the form of stories, resulting in a deep understanding of the meaning of the experience. Meanwhile, Grounded Theory aims to build new theories based on data collected systematically from the field. Narrative Research uses data in the form of personal narratives, in-depth interviews, and related documents, while Grounded Theory emphasizes repeated analysis of data to find patterns and conceptual relationships. Narrative Research is often used in educational, psychological, and social studies, while Grounded Theory is more widely used in sociological and health research. Both methods have their own advantages and challenges. Narrative Research provides in-depth understanding, but can be subjective. Meanwhile, Grounded Theory is more systematic, but requires complex and in-depth data analysis.

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