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A Practical Application of Analytic Guiding Frame (AGF) and Overall Guiding Frame (OGF): An Illustration from Literacy Education

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Abstract

This paper illustrates how the Analytic Guiding Frame (AGF) and the Overall Guiding Frame (OGF) are applied when analytic shifts occur in qualitative data analysis. Analytic shifts mainly occur when a proposed analytical method is found to be not fully amenable for analysis because of the contextually-bound nature of qualitative data. In this paper, the illustration located in the field of literacy education revolves around how a methodological and analytical problem was confronted during the fieldwork/analysis stage of research and how analytic negotiations were made with the help of the AGF/OGF framework. From here, it is proposed that much more consideration on matters of epistemology, methodology, research objective and research questions in qualitative research must be made when the iterative process of qualitative data analysis takes place.

Keywords

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This paper illustrates how the Analytic Guiding Frame (AGF) and the Overall Guiding Frame (OGF) are applied when analytic shifts occur in qualitative data analysis. Analytic shifts mainly occur when a proposed analytical method is found to be not fully amenable for analysis because of the contextually-bound nature of qualitative data. In this paper, the illustration located in the field of literacy education revolves around how a methodological and analytical problem was confronted during the fieldwork/analysis stage of research and how analytic negotiations were made with the help of the AGF/OGF framework. From here, it is proposed that much more consideration on matters of epistemology, methodology, research objective and research questions in qualitative research must be made when the iterative process of qualitative data analysis takes place. Keywords: Analytic Guiding Frame (AGF), Overall Guiding Frame (OGF), Critical Flexibility, Adaptations in Qualitative Research, Literacy Education

Background

I argued in a recently published paper that, in doing qualitative research, a challenge that often arises is in finding a framework upon which to negotiate analytical shifts (Chong, 2019). These analytical shifts occur when ready-made analytical steps cannot immediately fit with all qualitative data. I argue broadly that there are three factors which contribute to this challenge (Chong, 2019). I will, here, summarise the three factors. First, qualitative data analysis requires explicit reporting that can often be demanding especially as it relates to ensuring that the audit trail is conducted. It has been acknowledged that reporting the audit trail is fraught with challenges because it is difficult to "(get) inside one's head and effectively communicat(e) highly abstract processes" (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009, p. 78). Second, the chronology of the research process often means that a researcher is expected to anticipate the use of a particular analytical method, but only insofar as that anticipation can be practically and ethically executed upon collection of data. However, because the nature of qualitative data collection is context-bound and can often result in unexpected outcomes, the initially identified analytical method may sometimes need to be amended halfway through the research. Thus, the challenge in making this amendment lies in how the researcher requires a systematic framework upon which the logic of the amendment can be worked out. Third, the absence of the researcher's biographical stance impedes the audit trail reporting. This is because the interpretivist paradigm requires an understanding of the researcher's theoretical lens through which raw data is interpreted. Without this, critical connections that are made across data and analysis of data may not come through.

In sum, when analytic amendments are needed, they require a systematic framework upon which these amendments can be made. This is not a new realisation. Much effort has been and continues to be made to address such shifts. Addressing the scarcity of analytic

reflexivity, Srivastava and Hopwood for example (2009) proposed a practical iterative framework for data analysis that prizes reflexivity in qualitative data analysis. Central to their framework is the awareness that analytic reflexivity in iterative analysis is not simply mechanical repetition of data consideration but is an organic, constructivist act that results in insightful connections. More importantly, Srivastava and Hopwood illustrate the reflexive moves through what they term as "I" (or me) questions, namely, "What is the data telling me?" "What do I want to know?" and "What is the relationship between the two?" (2009). As useful as their framework is for iterative analysis, the limitation of space did not allow them to discuss their analytical challenge in relation to specific analytical methodological decisions. In this paper, I address the challenge of making this shift as it relates to the way in which the decision on analytical methodology can undergo a subtle change. In my previous paper, I proposed the Analytic Guiding Frame (AGF) and Overall Guiding Frame (OGF) to be used as a framework upon which negotiations can be made when analytical change is confronted (Chong, 2019). Although an example drawn from my PhD work (Chong, 2014) was alluded to in that paper, a detailed illustration depicting the analytical struggle was not presented due to space limitations. Therefore, in this current paper, a detailed illustration of how the AGF and OGF were applied to the analysis of a specific research study will be discussed. Particularly, this illustration will be located in the field of literacy education.

Qualitative methodology in literacy educational research

The last four decades have witnessed the rise of the qualitative research paradigm in social research. This has meant that a major field like education has benefitted from applications of qualitative methodologies and methods that account for contextual differences and human, lived experience. However, for all the progress made, qualitative researchers continue to confront what Miller, Nelson, and Moore (1998, p. 380) in citing Punch (1994), refer to as "the perils and pitfalls of choosing to do qualitative work in the (education) academy" as a whole.

Such perils and pitfalls are also encountered in the field of literacy education. According to Mirhosseini (2017), qualitative research work for language and literacy located in interpretive and critical research approaches also appears to be less acknowledged, especially in terms of government funding or academy acceptance. This is, in part, due to the dominance of quantitatively-informed methodology in educational and language research, as well as the relatively new shift in literacy as sociocultural practice which only recently occupied significant and legitimate academic space (Gee, 2008; Heath, 1983; Vygotskiĭ 1986). Mirhosseini urges for the consideration of "literacy issues at more fundamental epistemological and methodological levels" (2017, p. 4). He argues that the turn towards qualitatively-informed positions is important not only because it can yield complementary perspectives but that these perspectives are ontologically amenable to matters related to literacy education.

Together with an international team of literacy researchers, I have elsewhere brought qualitative methodological perspectives to bear towards an inclusive understanding of literacy experience (Arizpe & Cliff Hodges, 2018; Chong, 2018c). This paper extends and complements such current work that unravels the complexities of literacy research through the use of interpretive methodologies.

Context of the study and area of research

In this section, I will discuss the immediate and indirect context within which this study was located.

As a Malaysian, I experience reading through multiple languages and writing systems. This means not only confronting a variety of syntax and lexicons, but also a range of rich sociocultural, political and historical influences in the way the different languages are used and lived by. Our multilingual and multicultural environment is as a result of our migratory and national history as it interweaves with our postcolonial trajectory. Yet, although Malaysia is a country with high literacy levels and multilingual ability, its citizenry is paradoxically not known for their reading habits (Bernama, 2011; Siti Aishah, 2002; Small, 1996). As literacy is a key component of human development in an age where knowledge has become a critical commodity, it is important to understand why highly-literate Malaysians may not choose to read beyond academic obligations. As a lecturer and researcher, this became the key objective that underpinned my research.

Thus, the study referred to in this paper evolved from my biographical stance and my own early interest about the ways in which young people in Malaysia live their literate lives (Chong & Lai, 2007; Chong & Renganathan, 2008). Particularly, my research was driven by that highly-literate/poorly-motivated paradox I confronted especially when I taught undergraduates in the university. Thus, with this as a backdrop, I set out to understand how multilingual Malaysian undergraduates experienced reading in a British university so as to draw out the nature of reading amongst the undergraduates. The locale of the research being in Britain was influenced by where I was geographically located during the research as well as by how I wanted to understand the multilingual reader's experience of reading in a largely monolingual context. Before delineating the research design for this study, it is important to explain how I operationally defined reading.

Literacy, reading and the sociocultural turn

The notion of reading has undergone important transformations especially in terms of how reading has been understood to be more than just a decoding skill (Chall, 1967, 1983; Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). If, in the mid-20th century, reading was largely seen as a neutral, mechanically taught skill, the introduction of critical and sociocultural theories into reading research at the latter part of the century began to encourage educators to see reading as a sociocultural construct that is not neutral (Freire, 1984; Freire, Freire, & de Oliveira, 2014; Heath, 1983; Kress, 2000; Street, 2001; The New London Group, 2000). This theoretical turn challenged and transformed the otherwise mechanical ways in which children were taught to read. This transformation is timely in terms of how the face of literacy in the digital age has also changed, thereby opening up new ways of seeing reading through technological means (Chong, 2018a, 2018b; Kalantzis, Cope, Chan, & Dalley-Trim, 2016).

Yet, although this theoretical turn gained ground in the late 20th century, it was found that a much older account of literature and literary theory that had already taken shape in early 20th century was to be critical in providing basis for the sociocultural turn in reading theories. Rosenblatt's (1938) transactional theory of reading argued that meaning-making occurs in an organic, unpredictable, transactional way across reader, text and context which then broke down barriers of genre theories that would otherwise determine how a text should be interpreted. This gave way to the notion that texts, regardless of genres, could be interpreted and made sense of in a multitude of ways bound only by how the reader located within a sociocultural, geopolitical and historical milieu experiences the reading act that occurs. Underpinned by this theoretical lens within my study, I defined reading as a human experience that is transactional and is unique to how the reader transacts with text and interprets the experience (Rosenblatt, 1978, 2005).

The research design of this study was qualitatively-informed and interpretivist in paradigm. Because my theoretical framework was underpinned by a transactional theory of

reading which prized the experience of reading, this went on to inform the methodological decision of the study. Phenomenology, as will be discussed in the next section, became a considered methodological choice because of the way it is dedicated to arrive at the heart of human experience. Thus, the rationale was that if I could understand the complex human phenomenon of reading, I would be able to understand why literate Malaysians chose not to read.

Making critical connections

Methodological decision before fieldwork

Phenomenology is widely accepted as having originated from Husserl's (1931) philosophy, which advocates it as the scientific and structural study of a phenomenon. Less known is the fact that Husserl based his work on Brentano's (1874/1973) philosophical discussions on what he (Brentano) would refer to as the "intentionality" of human experience. It is this concept of intentionality, or the effect of *noema/noesis,* that forms the philosophical argument of phenomenology. The philosophical discourse deconstructs the notion of human experience particularly in how human action and human thought are bound together to form experience. Thus, to understand the "intentionality" of human experience is to see it as being objectified so that the individual may see and apprehend the experience anew. According to this logic, the phenomenological methodology is argued to be able to unearth the essence of a particular human experience.

Following from this, findings from phenomenological analyses often portray a phenomenon as event-like. This implies that a phenomenon would presumably have a beginning, middle, and an end, thus lending the phenomenon a shape. This explains why phenomenological psychologists investigate events like divorce, childbearing, homesickness and falling victim to robbery (Giorgi, 1985). Thus, these phenomena were then thought of as being noun-, rather than verb-like.

I initially posited that phenomenological methodology would be useful for the way in which it could provide the necessary distance to examine a phenomenon that has been taken for granted. This is because, since the idea and act of reading was something that I presumed to know about, my study would benefit from a distanced perspective. Because my study was initially informed by this thinking, which is also shaped by my own academic experience, my treatment of the notion of reading (at the research design phase) also took on a noun-like state. From this, my research objective was to understand the phenomenon of reading from the lived experience of multilingual, multiliterate Malaysian undergraduates. My research question was "What is the undergraduate's experience of academic and non-academic reading?" Guided by phenomenologically-informed interview (Seidman, 2006), I utilised the three-step (past-current-meaning) interview structure to theorise that their past and current experience of confronting a wide range of materials will illuminate the research question.

Methodological and analytical problem during fieldwork

In what follows, I provide a narrative that explains, from an analytical perspective, why I experienced an analytical problem at the analytical stage in my research.

In the initial theorisation of my research, I posited that reading is a transactional experience that could be essentialised and, to an extent, objectified. This meant that, even if the transactional nature of reading was fluid and on-going, it is still possible to get to the heart of the experience and eventually see it in its essentialised state. In this way, I had theorised that reading was noun-like.

However, because qualitative research requires context-bound data to inform the outcomes of the research, my analytical process was challenged as fieldwork went underway. This came about as the participant interviews began to take place. I noticed that the reading experience as it was seen through the participants' eyes was not set in neatly bound segments, nor bordered by a fixed reading material, nor within a fixed context. This is despite the divisive way with which my interview method confronted the phenomenon.

Take for example the case of Zee, a law undergraduate. Zee appeared to be an avid reader who read across academic and non-academic texts. When asked what her choice of bedside reading was, her answer was unexpected. The following interview excerpt illustrates this (this excerpt is also analysed and discussed in Chong, 2018c).

> SLC: And do you have for example, a book that you have that you must read before you sleep or anything like that?
> Zee: Er (hesitates) no I don't, but very oddly (laughs), sometimes (laughs), I like to read the Federal Constitution (laughs).
> SLC: Yeah?
> Zee: Yeah.
> SLC: Because then, is that, do you enjoy reading [when I'm] that?
> Zee: Mmmhhh?
> SLC: You enjoy reading that, right?
> Zee: Yeah.
> SLC: Right. I mean, I know you think that it might appear odd because you might think that it's not fiction…
> Zee: Yeah, it's not fiction, [conventionally thinking] it's not motivational or anything [right] but sometimes when I just want to get away from other things or when I'm feeling very stressed just continue reading whichever article I stopped at.
> SLC: And why does that give you pleasure? Why is that interesting to you?
> Zee: Em probably reminds me why I am doing what I am doing now. Yeah, like why why am I studying law, why am I working so hard now (laughs).

Zee's reading of the Malaysian Federal Constitution for pleasure stood out as a powerful example of how genres can be crossed. Even if the participants' texts appeared categorical (i.e. academic/non-academic materials) and contexts seemed predictable (i.e. term/vacation time), the abstract space wherein the reading transaction took place was unstable. Reading, it appeared, did not have a beginning, middle or an end. Instead, the reading experience was unpredictably fluid and on-going but in an indefinite kind of way. It became obvious that reading was not noun-like. Rather, it was verb-like.

This shift that forced me to expand my heretofore narrower understanding of the reading experience had a direct bearing on the way I had initially relied solely on phenomenological lenses at the research design stage and the way in which those lenses had to be further adjusted during the fieldwork and analysis phases. I gradually shifted from a purely phenomenological methodology to a more empirically-based phenomenographic methodology as my fieldwork and analysis got under way (Marton, 1981; Säljö, 1979, 1982). As a critique of pure phenomenology, Marton (1981) developed phenomenography based on Säljö's (1979, 1982) work. According to Marton, phenomenography is a kind of research that is aimed at "description, analysis and understanding of experiences" (1981, p. 177). Marton (1981) describes the purely phenomenological way of viewing the world as "first-order perspective" (p. 178). However, first-order perspective can be conceptually problematic. Marton argues that for researchers investigating the social world, a "second-order

perspective" becomes necessary wherein "we orient ourselves towards people's ideas about the world (or their experience of it)" (p. 178). This second-order perspective allows the participant to think about how they are experiencing a particular phenomenon (Brew, 2001; Marton, Fensham, & Chaiklin, 1994). Thus, it was this second-order perspective that was more suited to the way reading was experienced by my research participants. This development and shift in my research design meant that the purely phenomenological methodology progressed into the empirically-based approach of phenomenography during the latter phases of fieldwork and data analysis. Because phenomenography is derived from phenomenology, the shift was feasible.

The above narrative merely recounts in some chronology, the events that occurred which supported the shift. The following section illustrates in a step-by-step fashion how the shift was negotiated through the use of the Analytic Guiding Frame (AGF) and Overall Guiding Frame (OGF).

Methodological shift during analysis

The guiding frames emerged even before the analysis took shape. Drawing from the understanding that the analytical process must chime with the research design, I considered the process from two perspectives, i.e., Analytical and Overall. Although I rationalize the AGF and OGF in greater detail in my previous paper (Chong, 2019), I will describe significant portions of the paper in the following section.

"The Analytical Guiding Frame (AGF) provides the technical and therefore analytical framework which guides how raw data from the research can be unpacked and analysed" (Chong, 2019). On the other hand, "the three elements that form the Overall Guiding Frame (OGF) are the research objective, research questions and the researcher's ontological position" (Chong, 2019). The Analytical domain relates to the analytical method that is used while the Overall domain relates to the broader research design in terms of the research objective and research questions. Although seemingly separate, these two frames were often used side-by-side.

It is important to note that the frames were applied across the stages of research i.e., early, early-middle and middle-late, with "early" being referenced to pre-data collection. Also, progressively different considerations were made at each stage through the use of the frames. These considerations were the iterative analysis that Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) would recommend so that the researcher can apply critical flexibility in the way critical connections could be made across raw data and analysis of raw data. Table 1 (a reproduction) summarizes the steps.

Table 1: Steps in using AGF and OGF (Chong, 2019)
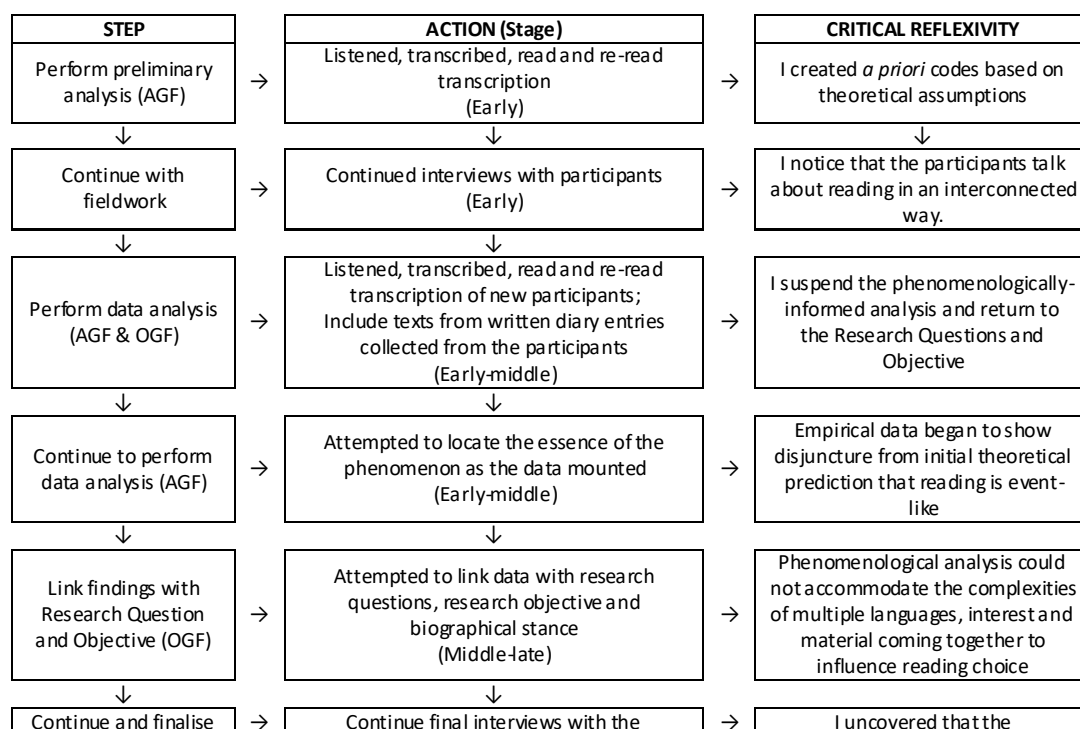
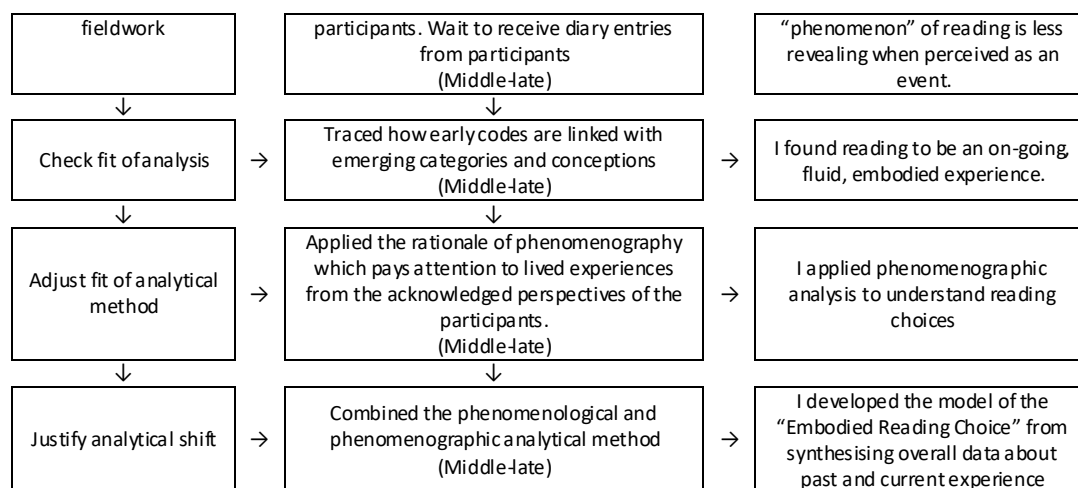| STEP	STAGE	FRAME	CONSIDERATION
1. Propose an analytical method (e.g. phenomenology)	Early	AGF	Begin with research design to carry out fieldwork
2. Perform preliminary data analysis	Early - middle	AGF/OGF	Confront data analysis complexities and check with Research Objective and Research Questions

3. Adjust fit of analytical method (e.g. phenomenography)	Middle - late	AGF	Continue with fieldwork and arrive at fit of analytical method
4. Perform main data analysis		AGF/OGF	Continue with focused data analysis and check with Research Objective and Research Questions

Specifically, what occurred was an iterative process that was made up of preliminary analysis (while fieldwork is on-going) followed by a reconsideration of fit of analytical method and a decision of how and why the shift is needed. Important to note is a researcher's negotiation of making sense of actual raw data (e.g. interview transcripts, observations from fieldnotes) and what the raw data may potentially mean when it is critically applied into the broader, theoretical context of the phenomenon at the centre of the social research. Such negotiations are made possible through the basic coding process which distils raw data and turns it into concepts and overarching categories (Saldaña, 2013). As raw data is transformed into concepts and later, categories, critical connection is forged when the researcher is able to justify how and why the findings confirm or extend substantive theory. While this approach may seem to be similar to Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory methodology, it differs in terms of its acknowledgement of an *a priori* research framework that shapes the way the data is analysed. Thus, in order to address the influence of the *a priori* framework, this approach which applies the AGF/OGF principles will be able to make clear how the data was analysed within the social and research context.

In order to further illustrate the shift, the following visual shows how I linked the steps that led to the shift as the steps are accompanied by the actions I took and the reflections that emerged during my critical reflexive exercise. Figure 1 denotes the critical connection.

Figure 1: Critical connection

STEP		ACTION (Stage)		CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY
Perform preliminary analysis (AGF)	→	Listened, transcribed, read and re-read transcription (Early)	→	I created *a priori* codes based on theoretical assumptions
Continue with fieldwork	→	Continued interviews with participants (Early)	→	I notice that the participants talk about reading in an interconnected way.
Perform data analysis (AGF & OGF)	→	Listened, transcribed, read and re-read transcription of new participants; Include texts from written diary entries collected from the participants (Early-middle)	→	I suspend the phenomenologically-informed analysis and return to the Research Questions and Objective
Continue to perform data analysis (AGF)	→	Attempted to locate the essence of the phenomenon as the data mounted (Early-middle)	→	Empirical data began to show disjuncture from initial theoretical prediction that reading is event-like
Link findings with Research Question and Objective (OGF)	→	Attempted to link data with research questions, research objective and biographical stance (Middle-late)	→	Phenomenological analysis could not accommodate the complexities of multiple languages, interest and material coming together to influence reading choice
Continue and finalise	→	Continue final interviews with the	→	I uncovered that the

fieldwork		participants. Wait to receive diary entries from participants (Middle-late)		"phenomenon" of reading is less revealing when perceived as an event.
↓		↓		↓
Check fit of analysis	→	Traced how early codes are linked with emerging categories and conceptions (Middle-late)	→	I found reading to be an on-going, fluid, embodied experience.
↓		↓		↓
Adjust fit of analytical method	→	Applied the rationale of phenomenography which pays attention to lived experiences from the acknowledged perspectives of the participants. (Middle-late)	→	I applied phenomenographic analysis to understand reading choices
↓		↓		↓
Justify analytical shift	→	Combined the phenomenological and phenomenographic analytical method (Middle-late)	→	I developed the model of the "Embodied Reading Choice" from synthesising overall data about past and current experience

The critical flexibility as seen in Figure 1 shows up how my initial theorisation of reading shifted when the participants' raw data began to be pieced together. This is because reading when theorised is different from reading when experienced and understood as being experiential. This finding is demonstrative of the theory and practice gap that occurs in research.

Discussion of implications and concluding remarks

In this section, I will discuss both the implications of my findings within the substantive research in literacy research as well as the impact of making the analytical shift.

The main implication of this finding within literacy research lies in the way the conception of reading should be assumed to be on-going even when it appears to have stopped. It was only a matter of time before a reader will engage with the next reading material. This finding had important implications for seeing that a cessation of reading is not only transitory but, more crucially, forms an in-between space where impressions and notions continue to be formed and transformed. In this in-between space, literacy educators may have to suspend the tendency to form an either/or judgement of literacy abilities and motivation. This challenges the way short term reading assessments are carried out in schools and the reliability of these assessments since readers learn and experience reading so unpredictably. Also, because literacy researchers necessarily investigate a phenomenon that revolves around the production and exchange of knowledge, they must therefore be aware of the implications of knowledge creation particularly as it relates to whose perspective knowledge is derived and created.

As for the impact of applying AGF and OGF when the analytical shift occurred, it showed up in how critical flexibility can be applied to adapt the research to a specific context. My study shows that a practical framework and critical flexibility requires the key components:

1) Epistemology
2) Methodology
3) Research Questions
4) Research Objective

My study argues that consideration must continually be given to the substantive domains of qualitative research i.e., epistemological, methodological, and research design (questions and objective) aspects of any qualitative research all throughout the research process. Table 2

illustrates how the key research components are illustrated and what the central outcomes of the applications are. This connection serves to demonstrate the fundamental nature of qualitative research that requires an iterative approach across substantive domains within the research enterprise.

Table 2. Application of key components in research in my study

Key research components	Illustration of key components	Central outcome of application
Epistemology	Constructivist-Interpretivist	Findings that both affirmed and challenged my epistemological perspective
Methodology	From phenomenology as methodology to phenomenography as analytical method	Shift in analytical method
Research Questions	What is the undergraduate's experience of academic and non-academic reading?	Shift in RQ duly justified that reading as a phenomenon was better understood as an on-going phenomenon and less as a fixed phenomenon
Research Objective	Understand the reading experience of multilingual undergraduates	Research Objective met

This paper began with the aim to complement a previous paper about analytical shifts (Chong, 2019) through an illustration of how an analytical shift occurred during the data collection and data analysis stages of research. It must be noted that the nature of qualitative research requires on-going efforts at making justified adjustments to the way raw data can be analysed. Thus, the application of AGF and OFG must be extended to disciplines other than education. This points to the need for more explorations and reporting of analytical shifts such that the subtle but important amendments undertaken in qualitative research can be justified and understood.

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