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The What and How of Essential Thematic Analysis

Elih Sutisna Yanto

elih.sutisna@fkip.unsika.ac.id

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Abstract

Gareth Terry and Nikki Hayfield's book, *Essentials of Thematic Analysis*, introduces readers to reflexive thematic analysis, a method for analyzing interview and focus group transcripts, qualitative survey responses, and other qualitative data. This method is based on the understanding that we all exist in a context from which we can see and speak. In this way, researchers produce knowledge that represents situated truths and allow them to understand others' perspectives on a given topic. The book shows how to construct a "positioned reality of the situation" from qualitative data. According to the authors, this method is not a methodology but rather a method; that is, a theoretical framework. They emphasize adaptability and subjectivity and go beyond data summaries to understand underlying structures. This method requires frequent data exploration and re-evaluation. It can be studied by both novices and experts. The method is illustrated with notes, illustration, and examples. This book provides a straightforward, concise, and comprehensive description of the authors' approach, including its methodological rigor, advantages, and limitations.

Keywords

focus group transcripts, qualitative survey, reflexive thematic analysis

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The What and How of Essential Thematic Analysis

Elih Sutisna Yanto

Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, Indonesia

Gareth Terry and Nikki Hayfield's book, *Essentials of Thematic Analysis*, introduces readers to reflexive thematic analysis, a method for analyzing interview and focus group transcripts, qualitative survey responses, and other qualitative data. This method is based on the understanding that we all exist in a context from which we can see and speak. In this way, researchers produce knowledge that represents situated truths and allow them to understand others' perspectives on a given topic. The book shows how to construct a "positioned reality of the situation" from qualitative data. According to the authors, this method is not a methodology but rather a method; that is, a theoretical framework. They emphasize adaptability and subjectivity and go beyond data summaries to understand underlying structures. This method requires frequent data exploration and re-evaluation. It can be studied by both novices and experts. The method is illustrated with notes, illustration, and examples. This book provides a straightforward, concise, and comprehensive description of the authors' approach, including its methodological rigor, advantages, and limitations.

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Introduction

I am familiar with qualitative methods that are often used in research and teaching. There are numerous, often excellent, texts and resources on qualitative approaches, but they focus on assumptions, design, and data acquisition rather than the analysis process itself. One of these is that thematic analysis involves identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, it is the first qualitative method that should be learned as "...it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis" (p. 78).

In their book, *Essentials of Thematic Analysis*, Gareth Terry and Nikki Hayfield introduce readers to reflexive thematic analysis, a method for analyzing interview and focus group transcripts, qualitative survey responses, and other qualitative data. This method is based on the recognition that we are all embedded in a context and see and speak from this perspective. By doing so, researchers generate knowledge that represents situated truths and allows them to gain insight into other people's perspectives on a particular topic.

Terry and Hayfield's book on a reflexive approach to thematic analysis explains how to create a "positioned reality of the situation" from qualitative data. The authors emphasize that this approach is more of a method than a methodology (i.e., a flexible tool tailored to the needs of a specific project; it also includes a theoretical framework). They value the flexibility, the subjectivity, and the ability to move beyond summarizing data to a deep understanding of underlying structures. The method requires a consistent effort to review and revise analytical findings as well as comprehensive engagement with the data.

Theoretical Framework

Thematic analysis (TA) as a method for engaging with qualitative data has gained in popularity over the past decade. Beyond psychology, TA has become the preferred method of analysis for many in various disciplines (Joffe, 2012; Terry et al., 2017). According to the thematic analysis research paper by Braun and Clarke (2006), qualitative research can be divided into two categories. The first category includes analytical approaches linked to a theoretical framework, such as grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, etc. The second category, on the other hand, is free from the constraints of a theoretical framework and requires a much more independent and empirical analytical approach. Thematic analysis belongs to this second group of analytical approaches.

Thematic analysis (TA) as a method for dealing with qualitative data has become increasingly popular over the last decade. Many scholars consider TA to be their preferred method of analysis, not only in psychology but also in a variety of other scientific disciplines (Joffe, 2012; Terry et al., 2017). Researchers working in most theoretical frameworks can use TA to make sense of mountains of interview, focus group, surveys, or other qualitative data. Terry and Hayfield (2021) argue that thematic analysis (TA) is a powerful analytical method that allows researchers to create patterns based on themes and meanings to report their interpretation of a qualitative dataset. As shown by the large number of theses, dissertations, papers, and reports using one version or another of TA as the primary method of analysis. And it has proven useful for both novice and experienced researchers. For those convinced of its benefits, it is seen as a rigorous, powerful, yet simple way to deal with qualitative data.

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that TA was commonplace, widely used but poorly described and defined. However, the situation has changed: Braun and Clarke's 2006 paper is now cited thousands of times on Google Scholar, and a growing body of corpus of work is now helping to clarify the different ways in which TA is used and understood (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2019; Braun et al., 2015, 2018, 2019; Terry & Hayfield, 2020; Terry et al., 2017). The work of Braun, Clarke, and their colleagues has shown that there is more than one way to express TA. Although widely read, Braun and Clarke's seminal work focuses on a specific type of TA – which they have since referred to as reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2018, 2019).

The concept of reflexivity, or the importance of the researcher's interpretation of the data, is at the heart of reflexive TA. In reflexive TA, analysis occurs *because of*, rather than *in spite of*, the researcher's subjectivity regarding their values, background, choices, and interests. Unlike methods that attempt to create objective “distance” due to concerns about bias, reflexive TA is based on the researcher's engagement with their data, guided by their research question and theoretical orientation (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). The authors claim that TA is a horizontal type of analysis. It is not intended for close reading of texts or themes in interviews. TA can be applied to (1) a wide range of theoretical frameworks, (2) a wide range of research questions, and (3) a wide range of data collection methods. Although TA in general is no longer “poorly demarcated” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 77), work needs to be done to ensure that the application and further development of reflexive TA continues to reflect its core values: theoretical flexibility, rigorously tested guided processes, an emphasis on the researcher's reflexive contribution, and themes as multi-faceted conceptual patterns based on meaning (Terry & Hayfield, 2021).

A distinguishing feature of reflexive TA is that it is a method and not a methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2018). In contrast to many other qualitative methods, it is not tied to a specific epistemological or theoretical standpoint. This makes it a very flexible method. This is an important advantage given the variety of work in studying and teaching. Methods are the tools we use to complete research tasks. They are organized into larger

research designs based on the needs of our projects (Nicholls, 2009). When an approach is packed with (sometimes taken for granted) theoretical frameworks that shape a researcher's thinking about a research problem and combinations of tools that support and enable a qualitative research project, it is a methodology. Although reflexive TA has a number of assumptions or values, these are designed to ensure its usefulness for a wide range of applications (including different data collection methods and any number of theoretical perspectives). Because of this emphasis on flexibility, understanding the theoretical perspective of the project before delving into the details of the method is key to success.

Findings and Discussion

Authored by Gareth Terry and Nikki Hayfield, the volume *Essentials of Thematic Analysis* consists of seven chapters and is structured to be easy to understand: The preface, by Clara E. Hill and Sarah Knox, is followed by seven connected chapters. Parts: Conceptual foundations of thematic analysis; project design and data generation; Data analysis: theme construction and development; reporting your research and writing the results; and variations on the method. The volume concludes with a summary and conclusions as well as an appendix with information on sample studies.

In chapter one, the authors address the conceptual foundation of thematic analysis (TA). They argue that researchers working in different theoretical frameworks can use TA to understand large amounts of interviews, focus groups, surveys, or other qualitative data. They claim that thematic analysis (TA) is a robust analytical method that allows researchers to identify patterns, themes, and meanings, thereby facilitating the interpretation of qualitative datasets. It has proven valuable to both novice and experienced researchers, as evidenced by the numerous theses, dissertations, papers, and reports that adopt some variation of TA as the primary method of analysis. For those who are convinced of its merits, TA is viewed as a rigorous and effective yet relatively straightforward approach to engaging with qualitative data. The authors emphasize that this chapter contributes to clarifying the structure and benefits of reflexive TA. They argue that the concept of reflexivity, which emphasizes the importance of researchers' interpretation of the data, lies at the core of reflexive TA. Reflexive TA analysis is enabled by the researchers' subjectivity, which includes their values, histories, choices, and interests. This approach based on the researcher's active engagement with the data, guided by their research questions and theoretical orientations, rather than attempting to establish an objective "distance" from the data due to concerns about bias.

The authors emphasize that this book serves as a guide. However, every research design has a history, context, and decades of academic conversation and writing. They therefore recommend thorough reading and refer to texts that have helped them in their research, as well as some of the writings mentioned earlier in this chapter.

The authors argue that all research must be located within a theoretical framework. Understanding and choosing between different theoretical frameworks and their underlying philosophies can be difficult but should not be avoided. They add that understanding a theoretical position is essential even when a theoretical framework is taken for granted or assumed within a discipline. They argue that this does not mean that researchers need to know everything, but rather that a working understanding of a research framework and its relationships to other frameworks is a good starting point.

In this chapter, the authors argue that those who have studied social sciences such as psychology are familiar with "positivism," the central theoretical framework typically associated with scientific method, and that testing and experimenting with hypotheses in many quantifications is not a feature of science as a whole but rather a feature of the social science. However, the authors argue that knowledge production is about much more than just

positivism. They add that the philosophical foundations of each theoretical perspective, even if they are not always explicitly stated, influence the way researchers understand the world, research, the nature of reality (ontology), theories of knowledge (epistemology), and values researcher understand the world (axiology). They believe that methods are often a result of these theoretical perspectives, providing researchers with a framework to think coherently about their research question and the research process.

The authors believe that some qualitative approaches come with built-in assumptions that guide the researcher's journey to understanding. For example, the analytical outcome of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is largely thematic and attempts to describe patterns in both (thematic) and (idiographic) interviews (Eatough & Smith, 2017). However, its theoretical foundations are inextricably linked to its methods (Smith et al., 2009). Apparently, IPA uses a variety of tools, including those for data collection (interview, often repeated with the same participants), sampling approaches (smaller sample size, homogeneity), and analytical approaches (both idiographic and thematic analysis focusing on individual participants and patterns between participants). The tools are explicitly linked to their phenomenological theoretical focus on the human experience and the specifics of individual lives, as well as the interpretive perspective needed by the researcher to understand them (Smith & Osborne, 2003).

The authors claim that reflexive TA was developed as a fully qualitative and interpretive analysis method. This is also known as the “Big Q” approach to qualitative research (Kidder & Fine, 1987). Big Q research contrast with the “Small Q” qualitative approach, which uses qualitative data but does so close adherence to the traditional “scientific” methods of positivism (e.g., asking whether these data are reliable or can be verified numerically or statistically; Braun et al., 2018). Big Q qualitative researchers, on the other hand, are concerned with resonance, transferability, and placing the research in a specific context. These researchers are not interested in truth, but rather in the production of knowledge that represents situated truths in which the researcher – informed by theory and understanding of a field of study and culture – can provide insights into that field. The measure of accuracy for researchers using reflexive TA procedures is not the reliability of the data, but engagement with the data. This engagement is generated through the six phases of TA: (1) thorough and ongoing familiarization with the dataset; (2) an open-ended, organic coding process that is not constrained by concerns about consistency between different coders, nor by the delineation and definition of codes; (3) the initial generation of preliminary prototype themes from the codes; (4) the development and testing of these prototype themes against the data and their refinement where necessary, which may involve a process of deconstructing and reconstructing new themes; (5) the definition and naming of final themes to serve as the basis for the writing; and (6) writing the report.

At the end of the first chapter, the authors emphasize that qualitative data and analyzes are co-created by researchers and their participants and are not simply discovered (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2018; Richards, 2014; Terry et al., 2017). The authors are also strong proponents of qualitative research, viewing it as a skill that can be learned and developed, similar to manual skills (e.g., blacksmithing, weaving). The processes described by the authors are simply ways to strengthen the skills and levels of engagement with data required to produce an accurate representation of a dataset analysis. The authors hope that this text will provide a common language for researchers and colleagues, supervisors and students, editors and reviewers, and authors, and provide readers with support and guidance in reflexive TA.

In the second chapter Project design and data generation, the authors discuss project design and data generation. The focus of this chapter is on the design of a study, particularly the research team, the types of research questions, some methods of data generation for thematic analysis (TA), and the way researchers might recruit their participants. The authors

also present the illustrative projects used in later chapters to demonstrate the power of reflexive TA. At this point, the authors emphasize that reflexive TA is merely an analytical method. Rather than suggesting that reflexive TA is implicitly a methodology in itself, the discussion in this chapter suggests the types of design considerations that a researcher applying TA might best work with.

The authors note that, as with any research, teams of students and supervisors must make a number of considerations when planning their project. These considerations include how ethics and data management will be handled and who will meet the ethics and privacy requirements of the institutions and professional organizations to which researchers belong (e.g., the American Psychological Association, the Australia Psychological Society, the British Psychological Society, and the New Zealand Psychological Society).

However, most students will work as TAs with the support of their supervisors. Young scientists work with a manager. For large research projects, a team of three to six researchers may read the data and engage in reflexive TA so that multiple perspectives can be brought to the analysis of the data. Larger teams are uncommon because it is convenient to coordinate meetings frequently enough to collect significant amounts of analytical material.

The authors argue that because reflexive TA centers the reflective researcher, each researcher's contribution to design, recruitment and data analysis must be acknowledged and reflected. Researchers' conflicting viewpoints on the data can be discussed and considered at the analysis phases. However, it should be noted that not all researchers are required to reach unanimous agreement on all data. Consequently, some analytical frameworks preferred by researchers, such as codebooks, interrater reliability, member checking, saturation, and confirmation bias, are incompatible with reflexive TA. Furthermore, unlike other approaches, teams working on TA must make many decisions collaboratively about their approach to ontology, epistemology, and data analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2016; Terry et al., 2017; Terry & Hayfield, 2020) integrate certain philosophical aspects into their design. These are considerations that researchers may want to discuss as a team on the topic of TA. Some of these concepts are illustrated using the person-centered care study.

In this chapter the authors present the person-centered care (PCC) study. The PCC study (Terry & Kayes, 2020) was a secondary analysis of interview and focus group data collected for three projects at the Centre for Person-Centered Research (PCR) at Auckland University of Technology's Center for Person-Centered Research (PCR). For more than a decade, researchers at the Centre explored innovative ways of working with clinicians to rehabilitate patients from illness and injury. The researchers hoped that the data collected would provide insights into how person-centered care is implemented in practice.

One of the authors of this book, Terry, began work on the tenth anniversary PCR project. A secondary study of existing datasets was proposed to give some coherence to the story the observatory could tell. Terry was the lead researcher on this project. However, other staff at the Centre were also involved in the initial studies and acted as consultants. The team provided useful contextual information about the original dataset, its participants, reasons for multiple interpretations, and key theories, rather than simply confirming Terry's analysis. In other words, team members helped Terry increase the amount and variety of resources available to him to develop project themes. Kayes (one of the project leaders and Director of the Centre) also contributed to analysis, particularly in developing themes. Her perspective reinforced and complemented Terry's, rather than simply confirming the themes.

The authors note TA can be used to answer a wide range of research questions due to its flexibility. The research question is crucial to any qualitative project and should be developed early so that it informs the design of the study. Unlike quantitative studies, it is possible that researcher's research question will be modified. The authors show how researchers can start with a broad topic of inquiry and later decide to narrow or expand the

original question based on the data collected. Alternatively, researchers may find that their findings are somewhat unexpected and require a change in direction to accommodate the shift in focus. Researchers may also be interested in multiple components of data collection and thus develop multiple study topics, although the data must be sufficiently deep and diverse to do so. In this chapter, the authors argue that TA's wide range of data generation options demonstrate its adaptability. The key is to provide a clear rationale to tailor the data collection strategy to the researcher's topic, objectives, and research question (Willig, 2013). The authors claim that interviews, diaries, questionnaires, and focus groups can be used to collect data about individual experiences and understandings. Focus groups, story completion tasks, and vignettes can help researchers understand people's views on a phenomenon, especially when they are not closely involved.

In the second part of the chapter, the authors briefly describe various data collection techniques that researchers can evaluate using TA. However, these are not comprehensive and other types of data collection (e.g., participants' diaries, other forms of secondary data) may also be applicable. The authors note that it is ethical for researchers to disclose information to their participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2017). Creating high-quality data requires a robust ethical framework. This framework should address informed consent, power, and abuse of research powers. Qualitative research is inherently unethical. To inform potential participants, information documents should clearly explain what the study is about, how participation is optional, how confidentiality will be managed, how to withdraw and what sources of support are available.

In chapter three, "Data analysis familiarization and coding," the authors explain in detail that the process of reflexive thematic analysis (TA) includes six different phases: (a) familiarize researchers with the data, (b) assign codes to the data, (c) generate initial themes, (d) develop and review the identified themes, (e) define and label the themes, and (f) write the final report. They argue that these phenomena are commonly referred to as phases rather than stages because there is no linear progression in the intended process. This chapter examines the first two phases of reflexive thematic analysis (TA), with procedures facilitating initial interaction with researchers' data and leading to more systematic and structured engagement. The authors led a discussion about the decision-making process in coding and highlighted the idea that codes could be viewed as a valuable tool for scholars in developing thematic frameworks.

The main idea is that the authors emphasize the importance of researchers starting their work with the first two phases, which involve gaining a comprehensive understanding of the data and coding the entire data set. These phases are considered cornerstones on which the subsequent analysis is built. Additionally, the authors suggest that certain phases must precede others, but advise researchers not to perceive them as a linear sequence, similar to a procedural recipe for conducting analysis. Instead, they advocate an iterative and recursive approach to these phases that allows for thorough and meaningful examination of the research data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke et al., 2015; Terry et al., 2017). In this chapter the authors suggest that to generate a robust TA, researchers must first gain a comprehensive understanding of their data. In this scenario, familiarization refers to researchers' conscious engagement with the data themselves and engaging in reading activities designed to immerse themselves in their dataset. This task can be challenging, especially when researchers have a large amount of data corpus. Nevertheless, as already emphasized, it is crucial to actively participate in the process of familiarization and coding, as these initial phases lay the foundation for a robust theoretical framework. The process of familiarization for researchers can include multiple aspects of data collection and creation, including getting to know the data through activities such as conducting and transcribing interviews and focus groups, as well as reviewing survey responses, story completion tasks, and vignette studies.

In the second phase, called “coding,” the authors suggest that researchers can begin the coding process after becoming fully familiar with the data and developing a sound understanding of its substance. In this phase, the researchers handle the data more methodically and rigorously compared to the familiarization phase. The authors highlight the need not to approach this task hastily or quickly. It is emphasized that a crucial aspect of qualitative analysis is the time required for a comprehensive and thorough examination of the data. According to the authors, the main goal of coding is to increase the level of involvement of researchers in the data and to facilitate its organization into more easily understandable parts.

The authors claim that reflexive thematic analysis involves two primary levels of coding: semantic coding and latent coding. Semantic codes usually operate at the superficial level of the data, often summarizing or succinctly representing a point made by the participant. In contrast, latent codes require a more comprehensive analysis of the data and include underlying aspects that require personal interpretation. Scholars often use theoretical frameworks acquired through extensive research in a specific field. Unlike deductive analysis, the assignment of labels to latent codes is guided by theoretical considerations to facilitate organization rather than dictate the focus of the investigation.

Chapter 4, “Data analysis theme construction and development,” covers a deep understanding of the dataset, a significant number of familiarization notes, and a comprehensive compilation of scripts and associated data, including phase three: initial theme generation, phase four: developing and reviewing themes, and phase five: naming and defining themes. Chapter four examines the three basic phases of reflexive thematic analysis (TA), which play a crucial role in the process of theme construction. The authors emphasize the importance of starting with a set of well-established resources. These resources are gained through familiarization and coding. They add that these resources are fundamental elements that researchers use when creating their thematic frameworks. The authors emphasized the importance of researchers delving even deeper into the data during these phases than in the familiarization and coding phases. This is achieved by creating, reviewing, and developing a series of prototype themes and then naming and defining the selected themes. Thus, these different phases together lead to the formation of robust and conceptually complex themes that go beyond the mere presentation or summary of the data. They offer rich material to guide and organize the writing process.

The authors claim that researchers need specific resources and raw materials to create their thematic framework and effectively answer their study questions. They particularly emphasize the importance of developing codes at this stage. The transition from codes to themes does not occur spontaneously but rather emerges as a result of researchers' ongoing engagement with the data they have collected and the information they have not analyzed. However, it is important to recognize that there may be sudden insights or bright spots in the information. The authors' main argument is that conducting a thematic analysis (TA) is a skill that falls into the category of craft skills, similar to other qualitative research skills. It is a competency that is acquired through practical experience and practical application. One's own skills improve through repeated practice, combined with the support and guidance of supervisors and mentors.

In this chapter, the authors argue that theme generation is about creating meanings from a list of thoroughly developed codes and clustering or combining codes to create diverse and meaningful patterns that answer the research question. In this case, phase three of the initial theme generation of reflexive thematic analysis (TA) continues the engagement and active processes of the previous phases and delve deeper into analysis and understanding but is not the endpoint for researchers.

The authors note in a part of Chapter 4 that there are risks associated with the theme construction process, some of which may be more serious than the problems observed in other

phases. At this point in the analysis, it is often necessary for us to support inexperienced teaching assistants (TAs) who are facing similar challenges, and occasionally also support authors of articles that are in our review process. The authors believe that these problems typically manifest themselves in two different ways: first, through a rushed process of familiarization and/or coding that results in a poor collection of resources for theme construction; and secondly, the tendency to hold on unworkable first themes for a long period of time.

Chapter five, “Reporting your research and writing the results,” addresses writing analysis and emphasizes that this phase is a crucial part of the analysis process. In this chapter, the authors contend that in writing the results section, researchers have a final opportunity to review and refine their analysis considering the methodological integrity of their research and making connections to the existing literature. Prioritizing reflexivity and flexibility in reflexive thematic analysis (TA) requires researchers to consider certain factors when writing research reports.

The authors argue that writing the report represents the final phase of reflexive TA. Therefore, this aspect should be taken into account throughout the analysis process. Researchers will continue to articulate their themes in ways that enrich and advance the progress made in earlier phases, after collecting the most relevant data extracts for researchers' analysis. The authors claim that this also includes embedding the analysis in the sociocultural and academic context by incorporating relevant literature. This process requires a reexamination of the basic principles of sound research methodology, encouraging reflection on the initial motivations behind the research proposal, the theoretical frameworks that shaped the study, and systematically applying various methodologies to facilitate the development of the final scholarly product, such as a dissertation, thesis, journal article, book chapter, or report.

The authors suggest that before writing the results section, researchers should consider the key points when writing the introduction, writing the method for TA, and writing the data analysis. For example, the key points of a written introduction are to include a discussion of the existing literature, regardless of methodological or theoretical perspective. Researchers should then clearly communicate to readers what is known about their topic and what needs to be added or refined. Readers should understand the researchers' rationale for the study and the nature of the research topic they are addressing. The researcher's introduction consists of convincing about knowledge gap and how a TA study can fill it or add value. The authors recommend that researchers clearly formulate their goals and research questions from the outset.

In the methods section, the authors argue that the *why* of a process is often more important than the *how*. The authors argue that methods should be reported in a way that provides the reader with sufficient information to understand why researchers chose a particular method and how they (theoretically) used it to replicate research findings. In addition, papers should include theoretical perspectives and process descriptions in their results. The authors recommend that researchers clarify their TA types and choice of methodological package, including whether their TA is realist, relativist, or somewhere in between. Did researchers use experiential or critical reasoning? Have researchers analyzed data using inductive, deductive, or a combination of both methods? Researchers may have coded semantically, latently, or both. The authors recommend reading the methods section and not just reading through it.

In chapter six, “Variations on the method,” the authors examine two different manifestations of variance related to TA. The initial topic of discussion revolved around the possible emergence of TA when viewed from the perspective of coding reliability or codebook methodology, which are different approaches used by different educational institutions. These approaches require different procedures and correspond to a fixed theoretical framework. In

addition, as outlined in the first chapter, the authors discussed the impact of certain researcher decisions on reflexive thematic analysis. These decisions have the potential to influence the analysis process and the resulting outputs in different ways, particularly with regard to the theoretical framework used. The authors presented examples of different manifestations of thematic analysis (TA) as observed in the published literature to illustrate the possible occurrence of these different methods.

The authors point out that reflexive thematic analysis (TA) is flexible and can therefore be used in a variety of ways. As the authors discussed in the second chapter, the adaptability of TA to different research objectives, epistemological approaches, data collection methodologies, and formats was discussed. These are all reflexive TA variants. In the first chapter, the authors discussed the main TA schools and their philosophical foundations. Although not reflexive TA variants, these can result in turbulent TA environment, but improvements are being made. However, this chapter starts with examples of projects from different TA schools (a codebook; a coding reliability). In addition, the authors note how they differ from reflexive TA. In the second part, reflexive TA changes caused by different theoretical orientations of the data are discussed, while the methods and essential values remain the same. They examine three reflexive TA models (realist, relativist, and thematic discourse analysis) to observe all the phases described in this work.

Furthermore, the authors point out that some variants are extensions of reflexive TA, and not mere representation of a particular theoretical perspective. They note that thematic discourse analysis (TDA), also known as critical thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2014; Clarke et al., 2015), is a combination of TA and discourse analysis. This variant is similar to reflexive TA in terms of code and theme development but differs in its emphasis on discourse identification. The authors claim that the codes used in the approach are often latent, and TA practitioners may be more likely to focus on a deductive analysis style that considers existing theories or specific theoretical frameworks to determine what is of interest. For this reason, those who use TDA typically do so within a poststructuralist framework and may also draw on discourse psychology and the role that language patterns play in meaning production (Clark & Braun, 2014). This is because not every author who defines his analysis as TDA uses the TAs of Braun and Clark, and authors who use TDA typically use it in a poststructuralist framework, sometimes relying on the psychology of discourse and the role the linguistic structures play meaning in the production (Clark & Braun, 2014). The authors emphasize that not every author who defines their analysis as TDA necessarily uses Braun and Clarke's TA. Therefore, there are permutations of TDA as an analysis method (e.g., Moran & Lee, 2018; Staneva et al., 2018).

Finally, the authors point out that the early engagement with the data followed reflexive TA guidelines. The first phase consisted of reading and re-reading the interview. The second phase consisted of coding these data extracts. In the third phase, which again focuses on the positioning of participants and other people in the interview data, the codes were grouped by themes and an initial thematic structure was created. The fourth phase consisted of a review and further development of the original thematic structure. In the fifth phase, further literature search contributed to refining and naming the themes. The final report resembled a discourse analysis. Three types of accounts (deontological, consequentialist, relational) were reported. While the procedures were TA-based, the authors' theoretical frameworks (discourse analysis, positioning theory) influenced the focus and style of the final results.

As explained in their seminal work on thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) identified two distinct categories within qualitative research. The first category includes analytical methods linked to a theoretical framework, such as the grounded theory approach, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and others. In contrast, the second group does not rely on theoretical frameworks and instead takes a more autonomous and experience-based approach to analysis. Thematic analysis belongs to the category of analytic approaches.

Thematic analysis is a research tool that is characterized by its independence from theoretical frameworks. Compared to other qualitative procedures, it is a divergent, compatible, and highly adaptable approach. Thematic analysis, thus, facilitates the creation of a comprehensive, complex, and nuanced representation of a given dataset.

The present study examines the methodological framework of thematic analysis (TA) as proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke and more recently referred to as reflexive TA (Braun et al., 2018, 2019). The authors used actual data samples from their research to provide a comprehensive overview of the methodology and highlight its fundamental characteristics such as theoretical adaptability, a strong commitment to comprehensive and rigorous data analysis, a focus on researcher self-awareness, and the generation of complicated data, conceptually driven patterns (themes). It is important to recognize that the above fundamental properties of reflexive TA serve to provide a rigorous and systematic framework for examining qualitative data. The six phases of reflexive transactional analysis were also discussed, and their cyclical and iterative nature highlighted. This implies that reflexive TA was not intended as a rigid set of instructions or guidelines, but rather as a qualitative way to conduct qualitative research (Kidder & Fine, 1987; Terry et al., 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The book introduces four main concepts, the first of which is that thematic analysis is a type of data analysis that offers theoretical flexibility while recognizing that it is not an atheoretical method. The inherent flexibility of this methodology allows the use of different research queries and data collection methods, provided these are compatible with the chosen theoretical framework. The six phases of thematic analysis enable a comprehensive examination of the material and enable an ever-deeper examination. It is important to note that each of these phases contributes to the overall analysis process. Reflexive thematic analysis recognizes the researcher as an integral part of the research process, actively involved in the development and design of each phase of the project.

In general, the book is characterized by the fact that it appeals to a wide range of readers, including both beginners and experienced specialists. The methodology is supplemented by a wealth of suggestions, statistics, and illustrations. This literary work provides the reader with a comprehensive and concise presentation of the author's methodology, including its methodological rigor, advantages, and limitations. The book provides a complete overview of the principles and methods of thematic analysis.

However, the book has some limitations, mainly due to the lack of sufficient practical advice and real-world illustrations to complement the theoretical analyses. For this reason, it may be helpful to include additional practical examples, case studies, and actionable suggestions to improve readers' ability to effectively apply the concepts discussed. Additionally, it should be noted that certain chapters may contain excessive information and may overwhelm those unfamiliar with qualitative research methods.

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Author Note

Elih Sutisna Yanto serves as a reviewer for the *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, which is published by EMERALD, *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, *Cogent Education*, which is published by Taylor & Francis, and *The Journal of Asia TEFL*. In addition, he is a board member of the Exploratory Practice Indonesian Community (EPiC) and a teacher training and education faculty member at Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, Indonesia. His research interests are professional development for language teachers, Systemic Functional Linguistics in language education, and qualitative research in ELT. Direct all correspondence concerning this article to elih.sutisna@kip.unsika.ac.id.

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