

Editorial

Debates of the content and concept analysis

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During the past decades, nursing researchers and scientists, in response to the questions about many complicated phenomena they encounter every day, have widely used methods of qualitative study. These approaches would be applied when dealing with concepts that quantitative researches alone could not handle them such as determining phenomena, concepts, experiences and patterns of human behaviors. Also, it is an important tool for creating new science for nursing discipline.

Various methods have been introduced for achieving intended qualitative goals. This variety has caused confusion, complexity and numerous discussions in application and implication, especially for novice researchers; in a way that failure to comply with the basic principles of qualitative research methods could be observed in many published articles. This could endanger the quality of qualitative nursing studies. Therefore understanding the main characteristics, differences, similarities, and the precise application of qualitative studies are effective on their correct execution. Two of the most important approaches of qualitative study that have been used frequently during the past years are content analysis and concept analysis. These two approaches have an important role in developing the knowledge and understanding the matters of nursing discipline.

Definitions of Concept and content analysis

Before discussing the meaning of these two approaches, we should define analysis, content and concept, which are its main core. Analysis is the most important commonalities between these two approaches. Analysis could be defined as determining the sections and components and their evaluation against some known standards (1). The content which is analyzed in content analysis approach includes any communication material such as quoted responses, open-response research questions, interviews, observations and published media like articles, books or guidelines (2).

In concept analysis approach, the analysis unit is concepts. Concept is a subjective image of a phenomenon, idea or structure about a thing or an activity. Concepts are not words, because words are tools of communication and correspondence, while concepts have specific definitions in every individual's mind. According to Morse, concepts are "abstract representation of a phenomenon". Understanding that what could be defined as a concept is a complicated, temporary, uncertain and limited to a specific time period process (3).

Backgrounds and philosophical foundations

Mostly, researchers would spend too much focus on philosophical details of different approaches, which mostly have small or no effect on what they are doing. But when we are comparing the debates about two different approaches, stating the backgrounds and philosophical foundations is necessary (4).

Communication theory could be considered as the foundation for focusing on related matters to content analysis approach. Content analysis was first used during early 20th century to analyze communicational texts such as anthems, newspaper and magazine articles, political speeches, advertisements, tales and puzzles. This method was firstly used as a quantitative content analysis method to establish a consensus between the coders of media texts. Consequently, quantitative content analysis due to its simplification and distortion of the text by breaking it into countable units was criticized. These reviews finally lead to the development of qualitative content analysis which was conducted by subjective interpretation of the textual data's content through coding and systematic classification and determination of the themes (5, 6).

Paying attention to concepts and their definitions goes back to the time of Aristotle. Aristotle believed that concepts are abstractions which are contained of necessary and unchangeable elements of subjects. This viewpoint was later changed by other philosophers such as Descartes, Locke and Kant. But, despite the differences in the fundamental of their philosophy, they all agreed that concepts had an inherent nature and would exclusively be shaped subjectively. In fact, they believed that concept analysis was for their clear definition, in a way that its true value could be determined and defined in relation to any situation and purpose. The viewpoint toward concept, as time passed to the modern era, was criticized by many fields of philosophy

and psychology. Because in some fields such as nursing, some concepts would have completely different subjective reflections, based on the foundation of that field (concepts such as health, adherence, adaptation and suffer). Therefore, the idea of conceptual boundaries and providing flexible definitions for concepts were replaced by definitions based on the backgrounds and intended application. Generally, the philosophic background of concept analysis, especially in nursing, should be searched in the philosophic backgrounds of the used frameworks for concept analysis which contains the philosophies and theories of Hermeneutics, Heidegger, Causality, Reductionism, Positivism and most importantly, Wilsonianism (3, 7).

In the methodology of qualitative studies, content analysis approach could be considered as a branch of descriptive qualitative study and concept analysis approach as a branch of conceptual qualitative study. Descriptive studies are an approach of qualitative studies which requires less depth of the data and their results have less heuristic value; while conceptual studies are after the hidden patterns in the behaviors of a society, major or environment and their causes. Also finding the original meaning of concepts and matters of disciplines are other goals of this approach (8).

What matters is nursing researchers' familiarity with the goals of these two approaches. Understanding the goals of these approaches would help the nursing researches to become richer by choosing correct methodology. Researchers must be aware that the aim of content analysis is to describe the characteristics of communication contents and evaluate that who has said what to whom with what impact (9). On the other hand, content analysis is an approach which would evaluate the favorite concepts of a discipline to clarify the

characteristics or attitudes of the discipline's concepts. For each discipline, the aim of this analysis is to create conceptual clarity for the phenomena that are used in theory, research or implication (10).

The analysis process in content analysis and concept analysis approaches

One of the matters that is repeatedly observed in different studies, is weak application of data analysis process. Therefore, paying attention to the process of analysis in concept and content analysis is necessary. The process of content analysis is not looking for finding the relation between classes or creating a theory, but is focused on extracting classes out of the data. According to Schreier (2012), qualitative content analysis is appropriate for the data that require some degree of interpretation. This process includes systematic coding and requires data reduction process, which could be achieved by limiting the data to those that would answer the research question from a similar point of view. Based on the aim of the study, approaches used in content analysis would include inductive, comparative, or a combination of both. Inductive approach would be used when previous knowledge about the background of the phenomenon is limited or does not have sufficient coherence. In this method, codes, classes or these would directly be extracted from the data. Comparative approach would be started codes or classes which have been extracted in previous theories, researches or articles. Comparative method is used when the aim of the study is to evaluate existing theories or reevaluate the data in a new context (9-11).

In contrast, the process of concept analysis is a useful process in the development cycle of the theory and also its evaluation. The aim of this process is to synthesize the existing viewpoints on a concept, distinguish it from other concepts and overcome the discontinuity in disciplines. This approach is

a tool which could be used by the members of a discipline to clarify their favorite concepts. The main units in the process of concept analysis are semantic, rational and contextual definition of the intended concept, and determining the antecedents, the consequences and related examples to the intended concept. Semantic analysis includes defining the literal meaning of the concept. Rational analysis includes the logical sequence of identification, determination and labeling the concept. The contextual analysis of the concept indicates the conditions and the background for manifestation of the concept (1).

In the process of knowledge development for nursing discipline, content analysis and concept analysis approaches have a special place. Content analysis is a descriptive approach which would provide the raw materials for further researches and discussions. On the other hand, concept analysis is an important approach in the process of concept development which would lead to the nursing theory. Furthermore, if content analysis would be conducted with a comparative approach, its aim is to evaluate previously presented theories. This way, it would have an effective role in modification of existing theories and nursing knowledge. Therefore, considering the aims of each of these approaches and their correct application, nursing researchers could use these approaches correctly with regard to philosophical assumptions and the aims of their studies, and would help the richness and development of the quality of nursing researches.

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