How to Improve the Quality of Qualitative Research? A Descriptive Study on Theses in the Field of Communication in Turkey

Nitel Araştırmanın Kalitesi Nasıl Artırılabilir? Türkiye'de İletişim Alanında Yapılan Tezler Üzerine Betimsel Bir İnceleme

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Öz

Sosyal bilimlerin ışığında şekillenen iletişim alanı, disiplinlerarası bir geçişe sahip olsa da kendi sınırları olan bir bilim olarak kabul edilmektedir. Tarihsel süreç içinde iletişim bilimi farklı konu başlıkları etrafında gelişmiş olup günümüzde teknolojik gelişmelere bağlı olarak farklı araştırmalarla yapılanmaya devam etmektedir. Bu araştırmalarda farklı araştırma yöntemlerinin kullanılması araştırmacıların da farklı kutuplarda yer almasına neden olmuştur. İletişim alanında yapılan araştırmalarda nesnel olanın geçerli olduğunu savunan araştırmacılar nicel araştırmayı önceleken, insan doğasının temelinde iletişimi ele alan araştırmacılar nitel araştırma yöntemini kullanmaya başlamıştır. Bu kutuplaşmaya ek olarak her iki yöntemin de araştırma konusu özelinde entegre olmasını savunan araştırmacılar da mevcuttur. Yapılan araştırmalarda nitel araştırmanın özellikle kullanılmasının nedeni iletişimsel süreçlerde insan davranışlarının, insana dair bütün olguların detaylı açıklanması ihtiyacıdır. Nitel araştırmalar, insan ve insana dair olayların ve olguların altında yatan nedenlere odaklanmaktadır. Post-pozitivizm ekseninde şekillenen nitel araştırma yöntemi insanın kendi gerçekliğinin temeline iner. Nitel araştırmalar, insan davranışını ve bu davranış etrafında gelişen olayları derinlemesine anlamayı, tanımlamayı ve detaylı bir şekilde açıklamayı amaçlar. İletişim alanında yapılan araştırmalar gözlemlendiğinde nitel araştırma sürecinin aşamalarının tam olarak anlaşılmadığı görülmüştür. Bu doğrultuda da yanlış adımların uygulandığı veya araştırma sürecinin eksik aşamalarının olduğu dikkat çekmiştir. Bu makalede ise öncelikle nitel araştırmaya dair bütün süreçler literatür doğrultusunda açıklanmıştır. Nitel araştırmanın temel felsefesi, araştırma probleminin ve araştırma sorusunun nasıl yazılması gerektiği, araştırma desenleri, örnekleme yöntemleri, veri toplama araçları, veri analiz yöntemleri, geçerlik ve güvenirliğin nasıl sağlanabileceği açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın kapsamı iletişim alanındaki araştırmalar olduğu için iletişim alanında yazılan lisansüstü tezler (yüksek lisans ve doktora) incelenmek istenmiştir. Araştırmada problem olarak görülen konu, Türkiye'de iletişim alanında üniversite öğrencilerinin hazırlamış oldukları tezlerde, nitel araştırma sürecindeki metodolojik sorunlardır. Araştırmanın amacı, üniversite öğrencileri tarafından hazırlanan tezlerde nitel araştırma sürecinde ortaya çıkan metodolojik sorunları belirlemektir. Diğer bir deyişle nitel araştırma sürecine araştırmacıların uyup uymadıkları, eksiklikleri ya da fazla yer verdikleri konular üzerinde durulmuştur. Gerçekleştirilen hatalara yönelik çözümlerin neler olabileceği tartışılmıştır. Söz konusu araştırmanın durum çalışması deseni içinde yer aldığı görülmüştür. Tek bir web sitesine (ortam) yüklenmiş yüksek lisans ve doktora tezleri üzerinde inceleme yapılmıştır. Dolayısıyla bütüncül tek durum deseninde araştırma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu kapsamda Türkiye'de ulusal nitelik taşıyan tez merkezinden ölçüt örnekleme bağlamında ve doküman analizi veri toplama tekniğine göre 26 tez belirlenmiştir. İncelemeye alınan tezler sadece yöntem açısından değerlendirilmiş olup literatür taraması, akademik dil kullanımı vb. etmenler analize dahil edilmemiştir. Bu doğrultuda belirlenen tezler betimsel içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Betimsel içerik analizinde önceden belirlenen temalar ise nitel araştırma sürecinin aşamalarıdır. Araştırmanın sınırlılığı kapsamında geçerlik ve güvenirlik kriterleri sağlanmaya çalışılmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlarda ise özellikle araştırmacıların araştırma problemi ve araştırma sorusu arasındaki farkı algılayamadığı, araştırma desenini tam olarak tanımlayamadığı görülmüştür. Bunun yanında örneklem özelinde incelenen çalışmalarda geçerlik ve güvenirlik kriterlerini sağlama konusunda araştırmacıların sorunlar yaşadığı tespit edilmiştir. Elde edilen sonuçlar, gelecekte iletişim alanında çalışma yapacak araştırmacılara, öğrencilere ve akademisyenlere nitel araştırma sürecinde dikkat etmeleri gereken noktaları göstermektedir. Araştırmada üzerinde durulan sorunların nitel araştırmanın kalitesini düşürdüğü gözlemlenmiştir. Dolayısıyla makalenin sonuç bölümünde araştırmacılara nitel araştırmanın kalitesini artırmaya yönelik önerilerde bulunulmuştur. Bu önerilerin ileride iletişim alanında yapılacak nitel araştırma temelli ve aynı zamanda karma yöntem araştırma geleneğini kullanacak çalışmalara metodolojik anlamda katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İletişim, Sosyal Bilimler, Nitel Araştırma, Geçerlik, Güvenirlik.

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Abstract
The field of communication, which has been shaped in the light of social sciences, is considered a science with its own boundaries, although it has an interdisciplinary transition. Historically, communication science has developed around different topics and continues to be structured with different researches depending on technological developments today. The use of varied research methods in these studies has caused researchers to be at different poles. While researchers who argue that the objective is valid in researches conducted in the field of communication prioritize quantitative research, researchers who address communication as the basis of human nature have started to use qualitative research method. In addition to this polarization, there are researchers who advocate that both methods should be integrated in the specific research subject. The reason why qualitative research is used in the conducted studies is the need for detailed explanation of human behaviors and humans in communication processes. The qualitative research method, which is shaped on the axis of post-positivism, goes to the basis of the person's own reality. Qualitative researches aim to deeply understand, define and explain human behavior and the events that develop around this behavior. It has been observed that the stages of the qualitative research process are not fully understood in researches conducted in the field of communication. In this context, it was aimed to examine the postgraduate theses written in the field of communication. The aim of the research is to identify the methodological problems in the qualitative research process in theses prepared by university students in the field of communication in Turkey. In other words, the research is set to examine how the qualitative research method is applied in the theses prepared by university students and the mistakes made. It was seen that the research in question is included in the case study design. An examination was made on master's and doctoral theses uploaded to a single website. Therefore, a holistic single case design research was carried out. In this context, 26 theses were selected from the national thesis center in Turkey using criterion sampling, according to the document analysis data collection technique. The selected theses were subjected to descriptive content analysis. Within the scope of the limitation of the research, validity and reliability criterias were tried to be provided. In the results obtained, it was determined that the researchers especially had problems in the research problem, research question, research design and validity-reliability. It was observed that these problems reduced the quality of the qualitative research. These results show students and academics who will study in the field of communication in the future the points they should pay attention to in the qualitative research process. Therefore, in the conclusion section of the article, suggestions were made to researchers to increase the quality of qualitative research. It is thought that these suggestions will contribute methodologically to future studies in the field of communication that are based on qualitative research and also use the mixed method research tradition.

Keywords: Communication, Social Sciences, Qualitative Research, Validity, Reliability.

Introduction

In communication sciences, which progress on the basis of social sciences, research is increasing in light of the technological developments. When we look at the research from a historical perspective, it is striking that quantitative research is predominantly used. Indeed, over time, there has been a need for detailed explanations of human behavior and all human-related phenomena. At this point, the qualitative research method has begun to be used by researchers and has paved the way for discussions on the method.

The qualitative research method, shaped on the axis of post-positivism, goes to the basis of the person's own reality. Qualitative research aims to deeply understand, define and explain human behavior and the events that develop around this behavior in detail (Arı, Armutlu, Tosunoğlu & Toy, 2009). A qualitative research begins with determining the problem about the determined subject of the research. Then, a theoretical framework is created for the subject. Research question or questions are written according to the theoretical framework. One or more of the purposeful sampling methods are selected in the context of the subject and problem in question. Data collection tools are created in this direction. The obtained data are examined according to the data analysis methods. The validity and reliability criteria of the research are provided and explained in detail. The limitations of the research, if any, are explained. The analytical generalizations that exist in the context of the subject, theory or method are defined. Finally, the contribution to the field and theory studied is clearly conveyed (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The explained stages of qualitative research are sometimes ignored by researchers. It is especially seen that researchers cannot provide objectivity in qualitative research. In addition, it is noteworthy that they cannot provide and explain the validity and reliability criteria (Borman, LeCompte & Goetz, 1986; Mays & Pope, 1995; Myers, 2000; Sandelowski, 1986).

The problems experienced in the qualitative research process necessitate further examination of how qualitative research processes are carried out in research. In this way, the quality of qualitative research can be discussed. By making the problems experienced in research visible, researchers can be given suggestions for the future. Therefore, it is anticipated that this article will make an important contribution to increasing the quality in qualitative research.

1. Understanding the Qualitative Research Tradition

Qualitative research is a type of research that examines human relations and the nature of various activities or contents in these relations (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). "Research in which qualitative data collection techniques such as observation, interview and document analysis are used and a qualitative process is followed to present perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic manner in a natural environment" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011: 39) is qualitative research. Developments in the field of social sciences, especially in communication sciences, have paved the way for the use of qualitative research methods in the historical process. In the studies conducted, it was realized that important details about the subject could not be revealed, especially when working on large samples in a quantitative perspective. Qualitative research began to take shape in the post-positivist understanding as opposed to the quantitative research tradition based on positivism.

The positivist paradigm does not care about information that has not been drawn with clear boundaries. In its objectivity perspective, it is understood that information that cannot be measured cannot be scientific information (Sargut, 2002: 125). The post-positivist paradigm defines systems as variables whose boundaries cannot be known in advance. This paradigm explains that measurements cannot always be made and that there

cannot be definite results. The idea that the future is not clear, is uncertain and that this is a result of nature prevails (Neuman, 2003: 91; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011: 32). While objectivity is important in positivism, in post-positivism, each individual is seen as important and creates his/her own reality. Therefore, subjectivity is seen as important. Therefore, in the logic of qualitative research, humans and all activities related to humans are seen as a whole and are intended to be understood. In this research approach, humans are intended to be examined in their own natural environment. Thus, the subject being investigated is interpreted according to the person being examined's own opinion.

The main purpose of the qualitative research approach is to seek answers to questions such as how the researched subject is realized, how it is formed, the reasons underlying its formation, how the activities are prepared, etc. (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016: 244). In line with the definitions made, the characteristics of qualitative research are listed as follows (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; McMillan, 2000):

- The research is conducted in the natural environment of the individuals/groups in the sample.
- The researcher performs the data collection process directly from the source.
- Detailed descriptions that will enrich the research are included.
- The process is focused on. An examination is made on why and how the behaviors of the individuals in the sample occur.
- Inductive data analysis is performed. In this way, important generalizations can be reached.
- The researcher's perspective is also important in qualitative research. He/she can participate in the research process directly or indirectly.

Patterns are an important guide when designing qualitative research. These patterns shape the researcher's roadmap. These patterns do not remain fixed and may vary depending on the process of the research.

2. Problem Identification and Research Question Preparation in Qualitative Research

In a qualitative study, the research problem may arise as a result of the researcher's curiosity or may be a solution to a problem that he/she sees as problematic (Sandelowski, 1986). The researcher needs to review the literature to clearly determine the problem. Thus, it creates the theoretical basis for the problem (Creswell, 2002). When determining the problem of the study, the researcher also needs to consider his/her own competencies. These competencies can be listed as the ability to review the literature, the difficulty of solving the problem, and financial resources. It should be noted that the research problem should not be confused with the research question or the questions included in the data collection tool. For example, "difficulties experienced by a first-year university student" is a problem statement sentence. The researcher or research groups may want to investigate the difficulties experienced by a first-year university student.

The research question is created to explain the determined problem in more detail. According to Şimsek and Yıldırım (2011), the theoretical basis of the researched topic is created with the research question/questions. Or, as the literature review is conducted, the research questions may change, decrease or increase. Preparing a research question and literature review is an interactive process. Research questions may consist of open-ended questions as well as closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions are questions that require personal interpretation. They are questions that do not have any answer options (Ural & Kılıç, 2013: 55). Open-ended questions are selected when there is no source or theoretical basis on the topic. For example; "What is the

corporate communication structure of brand X?" is an open-ended question. This main question may also include sub-questions. For example; "What is the quality of corporate communication between the human resources and accounting departments of brand X?" can also be asked as a sub-question. Closed-ended questions have a conceptual structure or a theoretical basis. For example; "How do you think the corporate culture of brand X affects the structure of corporate communication?" is also a closed-ended question.

3. Guide to Qualitative Research: Research Designs

In order for a research to be consistent, a strategy or roadmap is needed. In other words, a guide is needed that explains how all stages should proceed. The research design also serves as a guide at this point. Under this heading, the characteristics of six research designs frequently used in qualitative research are briefly mentioned. At the same time, a sample topic is evaluated through six designs.

The first qualitative research design is ethnographic research, also known as cultural analysis. First of all, it is necessary to mention the meaning of the word ethnography. "Ethno" means human. "Grai" means to define. Therefore, the word ethnography means to define human. Ethnographic research is a research design that establishes a relationship with a group in order to define and describe their cultural structure, behavioral patterns, and experiences. Since close relationships with the group must be established, the data collection process begins with observation and continues with interviews and documents regarding the group's culture (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016: 19). The theoretical basis of this research design is based on the anthropology tradition (Patton, 2015). The reporting process is in the form of defining behaviors, data analysis process, and interpreting the results (Lerum, 2001). In short, ethnographic research attempts to define the culture under study from the perspective of individuals or groups within that culture. It conveys this perspective by giving direct quotes in the language specific to the culture being studied (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). For example, let's say the research topic is purchasing behavior on social media-consumer behavior. Let's determine a research question and participants to be included in the sample in the context of the ethnographic research design. The research question according to this design is: What are the cultural factors that affect the consumption behavior of consumers living in the Eastern Anatolia region of Turkey on social media? According to the research question, the participants of the study can be consumers living in the specified region and using social media (there can be 20 or 30 people). Employees or managers of businesses with social media can be included in the sample.

The second design to be explained is phenomenological research. This research design focuses on situations that people are aware of but do not have a deep understanding of (Cropley, 2002). The aim of phenomenological research is explained as "discovering the meaning of individuals' experiences of a certain phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007). Its conceptual philosophy is existentialism. This design focuses on how people interpret and give meaning to their lives (Wade & Tavris, 1990). Interview method is usually used as the data collection tool. Interviews are conducted to reveal people's experiences and meanings of the existing phenomenon (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016: 21). Within the scope of purposeful sampling methods, people who have experience about the phenomenon being researched and are willing to provide data should be selected (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Based on the example given in the previous design, a sample research question for phenomenological research could be: What does shopping on social media mean for women living in the

Eastern Anatolian region of Turkey? The participants of the research may be 5 or 6 female consumers living in that region.

Theory generation design is defined as "a form of theory development based on systematically collected and analyzed data" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The most basic form of data collection to reveal themes for the theory to be created is interviewing (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015). Continuous comparative analysis is performed during the data analysis process (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). During the reporting phase, the coding done in the analysis and the themes reached are clearly explained. The model and visuals created for the theory should be clearly included in the study. When the example given topic is addressed according to the theory generation design, the research question is: What concepts and processes can explain the purchasing and decision-making status of female consumers living in the Eastern Anatolia region of Turkey via social media? Participants can consist of 20 or 30 female consumers living in that region, experts in the field of social media marketing (5 or 6 people), and academicians who are experts in sociology and psychology (15 or 20 people).

One of the most frequently used designs in qualitative research is the case study design. A case study is a research design that studies a current issue or event holistically within its own boundaries/reality and focuses on multiple data sets (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The purpose of a case study is to see the details of the situation, to put forward possible explanations regarding the situation and to evaluate a situation (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). As stated, multiple data sets are examined in case studies. Therefore, it is recommended to use all of the observation-interview-focus group-document techniques in data collection (Yin, 2009). There are four types of case study designs: holistic single case design, nested single case, holistic multiple case design and nested multiple case design (Yin, 2009: 39; Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2011: 290-292). In the holistic single case design, research is conducted on a single unit of analysis. Like a company, a factory or a school. In the nested single case design, there is only one case. However, this case may contain sub-units or layers. For example, a business is divided into departments. As can be understood, the holistic multiple case design is also selected when multiple cases need to be addressed and examined holistically. An example of a holistic multiple case can be given for studying the reputation perception of markets as private markets and state-owned markets. The nested multiple case design also focuses on more than one case, as in the holistic multiple case design. However, multiple cases are also divided into sub-layers within themselves and examined. Thus, multiple cases can be compared with each other. An example can be given for dividing private markets and state-owned markets into departments/sections within themselves regarding the reputation perception of markets. When we consider the sample subject given in the previous designs in general according to the case study design, the research question is: What kind of socialization process does an 18-year-old young person who has just subscribed to a shopping account on social media experience? The participants of the research can be an 18-year-old person who has just subscribed, his/her family and friends.

Another qualitative research design is the action research design. In this design, individuals take action to demand change in their own jobs or professions and conduct a systematic research (Costello, 2007). Any person in any profession, who is considered an expert in this field, can use this research design in their research. The aim of the design is to research the problems that people encounter in any application in their profession, to produce solutions and to increase the quality of the application (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016: 266). In general, action research is seen as a strong design used to encourage the transformation of the social structure (Norton,

2009). For example, a social media expert experiences some communication problems both with customers and with the use of the application while managing the social media accounts of the institution he works for. At this point, the research question in the context of the action research design could be: How can the communication problems and conflicts experienced by the social media expert with the institution he works for and the social media account be resolved? In line with the research question, participants can be people who purchase products via social media accounts (this could be 10 or 15 people), other people working on the institution's social media account and senior managers of the institution. Data can also be collected from the participants with a survey. Ferrance (2000) also states that surveys and tests can also be used in this research design.

Finally, the narrative research design focuses on and analyzes people's experiences of an event or behavior, their lived stories. The researcher tries to reveal the meaning that the person attributes to the experience (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). The narrative research design is a design used in different disciplines (anthropology, psychology, education, history, etc.) (Creswell, 2007). In general, data collection tools in narrative research can be field notes, storytelling, diaries, interviews, letters, biographical texts and autobiographical texts (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). If the sample topic given under the title is investigated in the narrative research design, the research question could be: What is the success story of a person who has shopped on social media for many years and then set up and managed his/her own social media account? The participant becomes the manager of the social media account.

The researcher who determines the design he/she will use in his/her research also begins to shape the people he/she will reach in his/her mind. The important thing is to reach these people using the right sampling method.

4. What are the Sampling Methods in Qualitative Research?

In a qualitative study, the sample determined should explain the relevant topic correctly. It should be aimed at solving the problem of the topic. A sample that will contribute to the research questions and the literature should be selected (Baltacı, 2018). There should be prior knowledge about the field to be researched (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In order to select the right sample, the researcher should also consider factors such as material, moral and time.

In qualitative research, the sample is selected purposefully. Because the sample of the research needs to provide a lot of in-depth information about the topic being researched (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016: 249). In qualitative research, "the researcher tries to understand natural and social events or phenomena in the context of selected situations and to discover and explain the relationships between them" (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016: 90). Purposive sampling methods frequently used in qualitative research can be listed as outlier case, maximum diversity, similar, typical case, quota, critical case, snowball, criterion and easily accessible case (Patton, 2015). The listed sampling methods can be explained as follows: Outlier case if there are situations that appear to be outliers in a research problem, this sampling method can be preferred. Outlier cases can be clearly defined and solutions to the research problem can be discussed. Maximum diversity if the purpose of a research is to discuss diversity or if the sample needs to reflect diversity, this method is preferred. Analogous case this sampling method, attention is paid to the selection of similar groups from the research universe. Therefore, the changes within the selected groups are minimized. Typical case if a non-extraordinary, typical, normal or mediocre event is desired to be shown, discussed or resolved in the research, this method can be preferred. Quota method is

similar to the stratified sampling method, which is one of the probability sampling methods. However, in quota sampling, the ratio of the stratum in the universe is not considered when selecting people from the sample. A representative quota is set. The researcher has a role in the process of selecting people up to the determined quota. Critical case If the research topic indicates a critical situation, this method can be preferred. The idea in this method is that the existing critical situation is likely to occur in another similar area. For example, if the price of a product is cheap in one store, it may also be cheap in another store. Snowball the researcher reaches the first person in the research universe in line with the research problem and purpose. Other people or groups that will be included in the sample can be reached in line with the information received from this person. This process continues like a snowball growing until the desired sample size is reached. Criteria the researcher determines some criteria in advance by considering the research problem. For example, whether people use social media, shop online or are university graduates. In line with the determined criteria, people, objects or events are reached in the context of the desired number. Easily accessible situation sampling method is a sampling method in which the researcher can choose people or situations that are close to him/her and that he/she can easily reach (Patton, 2015).

5. Data Collection Tools in Qualitative Research

After determining the universe and sample of the research, the researcher should determine the data collection tools. In a qualitative research, the data collection phase is a process that requires continuity. Individuals, groups or situations must be observed continuously. In this way, in-depth and rich data can be reached. Interviews are conducted with people according to the selected sample. Documents, records, documents, in short, various sources related to the subject being researched are examined (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; McMillan, 2000). In this article, interviews, observations and document reviews, which are frequently used in qualitative research, are also mentioned.

"Interview is the process of asking questions prepared in accordance with the purpose of the research to the person/people whose opinion is needed and getting answers" (Ural & Kılıç, 2013: 63). The reason for using interview as a data collection tool in a qualitative research is to determine the perspectives of the people in the sample on the subject. The experiences, perceptions, images and ideas of the people on the subject are reached with the interview (Bengtsson, 2016). The interview technique used as a data collection tool is divided into different classifications in a qualitative research. Interviews can be classified as structured, unstructured, semi-structured, ethnographic interviews, focus group interviews (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016: 155).

In a qualitative study, observation data collection technique is the witnessing process that the researcher carries out to reach concrete evidence in order to explain the research topic (Ural & Kılıç, 2013: 64). Observation technique is classified in different ways in the context of the differentiation of space and the role of the researcher. In the context of the differentiation of space, observation is divided into two as natural observation and controlled observation. In the context of the role of the researcher, the process of participatory observation and non-participatory observation takes place (Erkuş, 2005).

Another data collection technique is document analysis. Creswell (2002) calls document analysis the scanning of written documents that include the research topic and all kinds of information related to the research problem. The information obtained as a result of the scanning should create integrity. Document analysis also includes literature review. At the same time, it ensures that the data obtained from other data collection tools

(interviews and observations) in the research conducted are systematic with document documents (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In document analysis, in addition to written records, visual (photographs), auditory (sound recordings) and audio-visual (video) materials can also be analyzed within the scope of the research.

6. Data Analysis Methods in Qualitative Research

It is seen that descriptive analysis and content analysis are generally performed on the data collected in qualitative research. In a qualitative research, descriptive analysis facilitates the interpretation of the data obtained by the data collection tools by organizing them. In this analysis method, some themes are determined in advance and the data obtained are interpreted or classified within the framework of these themes. In the descriptive analysis method consisting of four stages (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011: 224):

●First, a boundary is drawn for analysis in light of the concepts highlighted in the research, the problem of the research, the research questions and the data collected.

●The next stage is to read and organize the obtained data according to the thematic boundary drawn.

●In the third stage, the read and organized data are defined by making direct quotes.

●In the last stage, the defined data are explained in the context of the subject, associated with certain concepts and semantic inferences are made.

Content analysis is actually a thematic coding method. It focuses on frequently repeated topics in the obtained data. The stages of content analysis can be listed as follows (Bengtsson, 2016; Merriam & Grenier, 2019):

●The coding process is performed on the obtained data.

●The codes are examined and combined to create categories. Sometimes the theme can be reached directly from the codes. The categories also complement each other semantically to create themes.

●All codes, categories and themes are checked and organized.

●Finally, all findings are read, defined and interpreted to complete the content analysis process.

7. How to Ensure Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research?

Researchers should also know that they need to present their findings to the reader in a valid and reliable way while performing data analysis, because readers are curious about the accuracy and consistency of the research while focusing on the research topic, method and findings.

In a qualitative study, validity refers to the impartiality of the researcher and the accuracy of the data. The criteria for the validity of a study can be expressed as follows (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008):

●The problem of the research should be examined as a whole.

●All the characteristics of the subject being researched should be focused on.

●When collecting data from the research sample, back-confirmations should be taken to obtain in-depth data.

●Subjecting the data to expert control is also a factor that increases validity.

In addition to the validity criteria listed, it is recommended that more than one researcher be involved in the data collection process of qualitative research instead of a single researcher. In this way, comparisons can be made on the subject by different researchers. In this case, it can minimize the reflection of the researchers' biases.

The validity approach is addressed in two ways. The first is the internal validity approach. Internal validity can be defined as the ability of the qualitative research process followed by the researcher in the context of the research topic to reveal the reality of the subject. In fact, the fact that the researcher's interpretations of the situation he/she observes reflect the truth, the findings are meaningful and consistent within themselves, and the findings are presented with evidence (participant views, photographs, documents, etc.) increases internal validity (Morse, 2016; Silverman, 2016). The second validity approach is external validity. External validity refers to the generalizability of the results obtained from qualitative research. The idea of generalization in qualitative research is that the result of the research encounters similar results when there is a similar situation or phenomenon in a different study (Baltacı, 2018; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). In fact, qualitative research is not conducted for the purpose of generalization. The generalization mentioned here is analytical generalizations. In other words, they are generalizations made at a smaller level.

Reliability, on the other hand, indicates that the research results can be seen again in other studies. Indeed, when it comes to the field of social sciences, reliability can be seen as a problem. Because human behavior is not clear. Sometimes it can be inconsistent and variable (Karataş, 2015: 77-78). According to Baxter and Jack (2008), the following criteria must be met in order to ensure reliability in a qualitative study:

- The research must have continuity over time.
- There must be agreement between researchers (scoring must be consistent).
- Internal consistency must be achieved.

As can be seen, one of the criteria for ensuring the reliability of a qualitative study is that there should be internal reliability. Internal reliability is related to whether other researchers obtain the same results using the same data on the topic being researched. In a qualitative study, the use of descriptive analysis, the presence of more than one researcher, the support of data obtained from observation with data obtained from interviews, and the theoretical infrastructure explained in depth are the factors that provide internal reliability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011: 263). External reliability is provided by presenting all data obtained from the study to the reader in a transparent manner, and by clearly explaining the sample and the sources accessed (Connelly, 2016). As a result, the researcher must present all stages in the research he/she constructs, from the literature to the sample, from data collection tools to data analysis and findings, in a clear and transparent manner.

8. Method

The problem of this research is the methodological problems in the qualitative research process in the theses prepared by university students in the field of communication in Turkey.

The purpose of the research is to determine the methodological problems that arise in the qualitative research process in the theses prepared by university students. In other words, the deficiencies in the research stages or the topics they over-emphasize are emphasized. The possible solutions to the problems that arise are discussed. In line with the problem and purpose of the research, the research question (RQ):

RQ: How are the steps of the qualitative research process reflected in the theses of university students in the field of communication in Turkey?

It can be said that the research in question is included in the case study design. As stated, this type of design is defined as "the in-depth examination of one or more events, environments, programs, social groups or other interconnected systems" (McMillan, 2000). In this study, an examination is made on master's and

doctoral theses uploaded to a single website (environment). Therefore, it can be said that the research was carried out in a holistic single case design.

8.1. Sample

For the research, it was deemed appropriate to use the criterion sample, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods. The determined criteria are that the theses to be examined should be in Turkey, in the field of communication, and should cover master's or doctoral theses. At the same time, theses were examined only from a methodological perspective. In this direction, from the theses included in the Thesis Center of the Turkish Council of Higher Education, only the theses that were in the communication index and used the qualitative research method were examined.

8.2. Data Collection Tool and Process

In this article, within the framework of document analysis, theses (documents) uploaded to the specified thesis center were scanned. As a result of scanning the master's and doctoral theses in the communication field of the thesis center (website), 7400 records were found. In fact, only 2000 of these records are displayed. Within the scope of the research, the theses on the first 4 pages of the thesis center's website were examined. One of the reasons for examining the theses on the first 4 pages of the research is that the research was structured by a single author. Reducing the number of theses allows the author to make more detailed analysis. In addition, although the research was developed within the framework of qualitative research, it was aimed to save time. There are a total of 120 theses on the first 4 pages of the website. 26 of these 120 theses used only the qualitative research method. While 21 of these 26 theses were master's theses, 5 were doctoral theses (Thesis Center of the Turkish Council of Higher Education, 2024). The examined theses were accessed between 01.10.2024 - 05.10.2024. It should be noted that the examined theses were between 2010 and 2024.

8.3. Analysis of Data

The 26 theses examined within the scope of the research were examined within the framework of descriptive analysis. As explained, themes can be determined in advance in this analysis method. The themes determined within the scope of this study are the stages of the qualitative research process. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011), the stages of qualitative research are:

- Problem definition,
- Theoretical framework,
- Research question(s)
- Sample description,
- Data collection tool,
- Data analysis and interpretation
- Limitations of results or analytical generalizations
- Contribution of the research to the field or theory

The theme of ensuring validity and reliability has also been added to the qualitative studies mentioned in this article. The theoretical framework has been specified in the coding table as a research design. Limitations of the results and analytical generalizations have also been included in the coding table as limitations and generalizations. All specified themes are a limit for conducting the analysis. In the next stage, theses were examined according to the determined themes. The examined theses were arranged and defined chronologically by making tables. In the last

stage within the framework of descriptive analysis, the definitions made were explained under the title of results and suggestions in the context of the subject.

8.4. Explanations Regarding Validity and Reliability of the Research

This article was structured by a single author/researcher. Therefore, ensuring validity and reliability is an important point at this point. In order to ensure validity, the themes in the coding table and the analysis made for these themes were checked by a person who is an expert in qualitative research. This can also be seen as an important step in ensuring internal validity. Explaining each stage of the research process clearly is also important in terms of ensuring external validity. On the other hand, obtaining expert opinion helps to reduce the problem of internal reliability. Providing complete information about the theses examined, making the coding in the context of the literature, and providing necessary information about the data collection process and data analysis process will help other researchers to repeat the research in this article. In this case, it is an important step towards external reliability.

8.5. Limitations of the Study

The limitations seen in this study; the research was conducted by a single author, the limitations brought by the research design, the sampling of a single website and the subject being investigated only in the communication discipline constitute the framework of the study.

9. Findings

The analysis performed are tabulated on the next page. Under the title of 'Results and Recommendations', the findings are evaluated and suggestions are presented to researchers.

Table 1

Qualitative Research Stages and Contents in Theses - I

Source	Thesis Title	Research Problem	Research Design	Research Question	Sample	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Validity and Reliability	Limitations and Generalization	Contribution to the Field and Theory
(Akdeniz, 2010) - Master's Degree	Face-to-face communication and persuasion in international organizations	Included in the	Not included.	No text.	Not included.	Interview	Descriptive analysis	Not included as	Not suitable.	It contributes to the field.
(Kavut, 2015) Master's Degree	Influence of family communications of intergenerational communication	Explained.	Phenomenology	Not written.	Maximum Variety	Semi-structured interview - 15 people	Descriptive analysis	No title - not written	Limitations and generalizations are not written	Contributes to the field
(Yakut, 2015) Master's Degree	Methods on establishing communication between the state and the citizens	No explanatio	Not written.	Not written.	Not written.	Semi-structured interview - 10 people	No explanation provided.	Content validity explained.	No explanation provided.	It seems to contribute to the field.
Demirkol (2015) Master's Degree	Manipulation as a tool in media with in the context of political communicati	No explanatio	Not written	Not	No explanatio	Interview - 4 people	No explanatio	Not included as	Limitations and generalizations are partially stated.	Contributes to the field.
Özergin (2015) Master's Degree	Streisand Effect on mass media A theoretical framework proposal	Explanation is	Grounded Theory	5 research questions are written.	Theoretical sampling is written.	In-depth literature review	Constant comparative analysis and descriptive analysis	Validity and reliability criteria are provided.	Limitations are included.	Contributes to the field and theory.

Table 2

Qualitative Research Stages and Contents in Theses - II

Source	Thesis Title	Research Problem	Research Design	Research Question	Sample	Data Collection Tool	Data Analysis	Validity and Reliability	Limitations and Generalization	Contribution to the Field and Theory
Yıldız (2015) Doctor	The effect of organizational communication of information and communication technology: The case of	Explained	Action Research	Explanation is provided.	Criteria sampling - easily accessible case sampling	In-depth interview - semi-structured interview	Descriptive and content analysis	Criteria are provided.	Limitations and generalizations are clearly	Contributes to the field and
Göç (2017) Master's Degree	Glitch as new media art and its reflection on visual communication	An explanation was made.	It was called interpretative qualitative design	4 research questions were written.	Criteria sampling - 18 people	Semi-structured interview - document analysis	Content analysis and descriptive analysis	It is stated that expert opinion was obtained.	Limitations and generalizations are included.	It contributes to the field and theory.
Yolçu (2017) Doctoral Thesis	Comparative analysis of mass media systems and politics over different continents and countries	Not clearly stated but it is understood from the purpose sentence.	Not written	10 research questions are written.	No full explanation	Document analysis	Descriptive analysis	Not included as a title.	Limitations are written.	Contributes to the field.
Arslantaş (2019) Master's Degree	Intercultural communication: subculture group living in Mardin Syriacs' communication with national culture	The problem statement resembles the research	It resembles cultural analysis but not	4 research questions were written.	Snowball sampling 20 people	In-depth interviews	Thematic coding was done but not written.	No explanations were made.	Briefly, limitations are given. No generalizations	It can be said that it has made a partial contribution to the field.
Ulucan (2019) Master's	Private security in socialization process and the role of communication for attitudes against in this	No clear sentence in			It is called purposeful	Structured interview	It is said that only analysis was done, but descriptive	No explanation in	Limitations are explained in	

Table 3
Qualitative Research Stages and Contents in Theses - III

Source	Thesis Title	Research Problem	Research Design	Research Question	Sample	Data Collection Tool	Data Analysis	Validity and Reliability	Limitations and Generalizatio	Contribution to the Field and Theory
İgit (2019) Doctora	Building empathic communication through digital games	Written but similar to the research question.	Case study - Holistic multiple case study	There are questions but they are not very appropriat	Criteria samplin	Semi-structured	Descriptive and content analysis -	Consistency, transferability and confirmability are provided.	The limitation is explained in the context of the sample.	It is associated with communication on theories and has
Çapar (2019) Master's Degree	The awareness of university students towards internet	Exactly stated.	Not clear, qualitative discovery is called	4 research questions were written.	Snowball sample 15 people	Semi-structured interview	Content, discourse, metaphor analysis	No explanation.	Limitations: research topic and sample	Contributes to the field.
Tokgöz (2019) Master's Degree	Reflections of industry 4.0 on corporate communication management:	No problem statement.	Phenomenology	2 research questions were written.	Criteria sampling - 10 people	Semi-structured	Descriptive analysis - and content analysis	Title is explained - internal reliability - external reliability	No clear explanation.	Contribution to the field.
Osal (2021) Master's Degree	Gossip and rumor management from the eyes of the administrators working in Izmir	Yes but similar to the research	Phenomenolo	Not written but questions included in the problem are	Maximum diversity	Semi-structured interview	Content analysis		No explanation provided.	Contributes to the field
Özsirke-cioğlu (2022) Master's Degree	Changing communication practices of individuals over 65 with thepandemic	No problem statement	Phenomenology	Unwritten	Maximum diversity - 60	Semi-structured interview - focus group interview	Descriptive	Expert opinion was obtained for the questions. Explained	Limitations are explained in the context of the sample.	Contributes to the field.

Table 4

Qualitative Research Stages and Contents in Theses - IV

Source	Thesis Title	Research Problem	Research Design	Research Question	Sample	Data Collection Tool	Data Analysis	Validity and Reliability	Limitations and Generalization	Contribution to the Field and Theory
Koyuncu (2022) Master's	Preschool teachers' opinions on the use of non-violent communication: A phenomenological	There is, but not complete. There are	Phenomeno...	Sub-problems are similar to the research	Criterion sampling - 18 people	Semi-structured interview and focus group interview -	Content analysis	It is explained under a separate title and criteria are	The limitation is explained in the context of the data collection	It contributes to the field.
Cam (2022) Master's D...	The effect of intensive use of communication devices on marriage satisfaction and face-to-face	The problem is written	Phenomenology	No research question	Easy-access case with snowball sampling - 20	Semi-structured	Content analysis	Explained and	Limitations; sample, data collection tool, pandemic process -	Contributes to the field
Kalkavan (2022) Doctoral Thesis	Supporting international students' intercultural communication and adjustment process to university through activities based on interactional	The research problem is explained.	Action Research	4 research questions are written correctly.	Easily accessible case sampling (convenient case) - 10	Reflective journal writing, interview, focus group discussions,	Discourse analysis, content analysis	The title is given and the conditions seem to be met.	Limitation; sample, time of implementation, There are partial generalizati...	Contribution to the field and theory. There is a different design suggestion.
Sarı (2022) Master's Degree	A qualitative research on the reflection of digital education on teacher-students communication in the pandemic	No clear sentence has been established but the study is based on a problem	Case Study	There seem to be 4 research questions but it may have been confused	Purposive sampling is called 15 people	Semi-structured interview	Descriptive analysis	It is explained with a separate title and the criteria are provided	The limitation is explained in the context of the sample.	It contributes to the field.

Table 5

Qualitative Research Stages and Contents in Theses - V

Source	Thesis Title	Research Problem	Research Design	Research Question	Sample	Data Collection Tool	Data Analysis	Validity and Reliability	Limitations and Generalizatio	Contribution to the Field and Theory
Çağıran (2022) Master's Degree	Anonymous identity and real (name) identity on social media: A	There is no clear problem statement	Phenomenology	Research questions are included in the conclusion.	Criteria sampling and snowball sampling - 15 people	In-depth interview	Content analysis	Validity and reliability are ensured.	Limitations are explained in the context of the sample.	Contributes to the field and theory.
Damar (2023) Master's Degree	Determining the communication processes or hearing-impaired children	There is a problem but it is not clearly	Phenomenology	There is a basic research question.	Criterion sampling - 22 people	Semi-structured interview	Content analysis	There is a title but nothing is written about the research, there is only a literature	The limitation is explained in the context of the sample.	It seems to contribute to the field and theory.
Vural (2023) Doctoral Thesis	Digital transformation in human resources management and the	It is stated as a	Case Study - multiple case study nested	There are 4 research questions written correctly.	Sampling method is not fully written. 22 people	Semi-structured	Content analysis	Only the title of reliability is given and explained.	There is a sample and time limitation.	Contribution to the field.
Özçelik (2023) Master's Degree	Perfectionism, self confidence and fear of negative evaluation in	The full sentence is not written.	It is called an unspecified qualitative design.	There is a basic research question. There are sub-research questions.	It is called purposeful sampling.	Document review	Content analysis - Discourse analysis Semiotic analysis	Explanation is made under the title of validity and reliability.	There is a limitation of the subject and sample. Partial generalization in the context of the subject.	It contributes to the field.

Table 6

Qualitative Research Stages and Contents in Theses - VI

Source	Thesis Title	Research Problem	Research Design	Research	Sample	Data Collection Tool	Data Analysis	Validity and	Limitations and Generalization	Contribution to the Field and Theory
Ateş (2023) Master's Degree	Digital solidarity networks in combating poverty from the communication perspective	No clear problem statement is seen.	Grounded Theory	There are research question	Specified as a purposeful sample. 11 people	Semi-structured interview	Content analysis - constant comparative analysis	Validity and reliability have been established.	Limitations; material, time, sample. A small generalization	Contributes to the field and theory.
Kara (2023) Master's Degree	The reflections of the global epidemic on the mediums used for theater presentation in Türkiye	Not fully specified.	Phenomenology is not explained under a separate title and is included in the conclusion.	It is in the abstract, not as a separate title.	Snowball sample 14 people	Semi-structured interview	No explanation but it seems descriptive.	No explanation.	The limitation is explained geographically.	It seems to contribute to the field.
Şahin (2024) Master's Degree	Investigation of parents' perspectives towards different alternative and augmentative communicatio	No clear problem statement is visible.	Case Study	Main research question and sub-research questions are available.	Maximum diversity - 13 people	Semi-structured interview	Content analysis	Expert opinion was obtained and pilot interview was conducted.	There are limitations in terms of sample, subject and data collection device.	Contributes to the field.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article examines how qualitative research method are used in postgraduate theses in the field of communication in Turkey. The aim of the study is to determine whether university students apply the qualitative research process correctly and the common mistakes. The findings show researchers, students and academics who will conduct future studies in the field of communication the points they should pay attention to in the qualitative

research process. At the same time, suggestions are also presented for what can be done to minimize the problems experienced in this study.

As stated in this article, 26 out of 120 postgraduate theses are structured only within the framework of qualitative research. Therefore, it can be concluded that quantitative research and mixed method research are more prevalent in the field of communication. It is thought that this is due to the fact that the qualitative research process requires more detail, takes a long time, and the problems experienced are in depth.

In general, it is stated in the literature that the problems that arise in qualitative research are due to reasons such as the study not being objective, not being generalizable, and not being able to fully ensure validity and reliability (Borman, LeCompte & Goetz, 1986; Mays & Pope, 1995; Myers, 2000; Sandelowski, 1986). Similarly, it is noteworthy that the necessary explanations regarding validity and reliability are not made in the theses examined in this article. Although the validity and reliability processes are correctly conveyed in some studies, it is seen that these two concepts are generally not included.

Qualitative research requires working with relatively smaller samples. Therefore, this is seen as a limitation and paves the way for discussion of the problem of generalizability (Myers, 2000; Sharts-Hopko, 2002; Yin, 1994). The aim of qualitative research is not to generalize the results obtained. However, analytical generalizations can be reached (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In the articles examined, it is also noted that the limitations of the authors are the sample, data collection tool, geography of residence, and the specific boundaries of the subject. In addition, it was determined that analytical generalizations could not be reached in most of the theses examined, except for a few. However, it can be said that the theses contribute to the field in the context of the subject studied.

Other problems that stand out in the 26 theses whose qualitative research processes were examined within the scope of this article can be listed as follows:

●Most studies did not have a problem statement written and the research problem was not presented under a separate heading. The problem statements that were written were mixed with the research question.

The problem of a qualitative study is written to express a situation that provides a solution to the topic being studied. Research questions are questions that detail the problem and are based on theoretical foundations (Sandelowski, 1986; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

●In the examined theses, research designs were generally explained. However, it was observed that some theses could not fully explain the research design. Namely, it is noteworthy that although the study is in a certain type of design, the researcher did not define that design.

The research design is a guide for the researcher and shows how the process should proceed correctly. This is why most studies encounter problems in the qualitative research process.

●On the other hand, it is seen that the research question is written in the research of most theses. However, these questions are sometimes mixed with the problem statement or mixed with the questions to be included in the data collection tool.

The research question is the detailed version of the research problem, while the questions in the data collection tool are the detailed version of the research questions. The research problem, research question and the questions in the data collection tool should not be confused with each other. The relevant headings in the literature transfer section of the article explain these topics.

●It was also noted that in some theses the sampling method was not explained or left incomplete. Similarly, it was observed that the data collection tools were also explained incompletely. It was noted that semi-structured

interviews were frequently used in most studies.

The sampling method should be appropriate for the subject being studied. The writings on the subject should be aimed at solving the problem, providing correct answers to the research questions and contributing to the literature (Baltacı, 2018). At the same time, the sampling method that will meet the needs of the research design should be selected. Failure to fully explain the data collection tool also raises the issue of validity and reliability. At the same time, it is recommended to use other data collection tools in addition to semi-structured interviews in studies. In this way, in-depth and rich data can be accessed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

●If we go back to the theses examined, it was seen that the data analysis process was not fully explained in most studies. It was noted that some studies did not have a full name (such as descriptive or content analysis). If the reader is knowledgeable, he/she can understand which data analysis method was used in the study.

Therefore, the stages of the data analysis process in research should be explained in detail. They should be included under a separate heading.

In general, the problems mentioned have emerged within the scope of the theses examined. However, it is still thought that this article will be beneficial for researchers who will work in the field of communication on how the qualitative research process should be structured. In order to prevent the problems listed in this article from occurring in future research, it is recommended that researchers first receive training in qualitative research. In addition, Pyett (2003) recommends that researchers have a checklist. Thanks to the checklist, the researcher will remind himself of all the stages of qualitative research. He will be able to see the existing deficiencies (Barbour, 2001). Of course, as seen in this article, all the stages of a research should be conveyed completely and in full detail. When appropriate, it should be conveyed with a critical perspective (Whittemore et al., 2001).

In conclusion, based on the findings obtained within the scope of the article, researchers, students and academics who will work in the field of communication should:

●They should pay attention to the difference between the research problem, research question(s) and data collection tool questions.

●Care should be taken in the selection of the research design in the context of the subject and the selection of the sample and data collection tool accordingly.

●Validity and reliability must be stated. Not only the literature should be cited, but also what the researcher did to ensure validity and reliability should be stated.

●The data analysis process should be explained in more detail.

●If the research has limitations, its generalization in the analytical context, its contribution to the field-theory or method should be clearly explained.

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