

Strengthening Applicability in Qualitative Nursing Research Using the Multi-Case Narrative Approach: A Methodological Insight

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Abstract

The issue of generalisability has been contentious, but valuable in the context of qualitative research, particularly in profession such as nursing because evidence-based practice relies on the evidence that is generalizable to various real-world situations. The concept of the conventional qualitative approach to reach this goal is usually lost because their sample size is minimal and findings are case-specific. The Multiple Case Narrative (MCN) method that emerged as a part of a constructivist-narrative paradigm is a systematic way of improving the degree of generalisation without degrading the level of contextual richness. This article does a holistic review of the methodological procedure of the MCN approach, its analyses, and theories, and its potential as a qualitative research tool that allows case-to-case, analytical, and sample-to-population generalisation. Using an applied example in nursing, the paper demonstrates the four-step analysis process of MCN: initial, mapping, focused and theoretical analysis. By comparing and contrasting the available insights with other qualitative research methods, especially collective case study, case survey, meta-ethnography, the paper criticises the rigor and weaknesses of MCN. At the same time as being more rigorous in terms of the comparison it makes across cases, MCN allows the use of larger and more diverse sample sizes than a conventional case study, raising the possibility of a plausible generalisation. It helps through systematic identification of patterns, associations, systemic problems in the varied case stories keeping the voices of individual participants alive in them. Multiple case narrative research approach is useful in qualitative nursing research since it contributes to methodology. It increases the possibility of generalisation and facilitates the result in the production of analytically strong findings and practical relevance. Perhaps a wider use of MCN can assist in filling the gap between qualitative inquiry and the demands of the evidence-informed health practice and policy.

Keywords: *Multiple Case Narrative, Generalisation, Qualitative Research, Case-to-Case Transferability, Nursing Methodology, Constructivist Inquiry, Cross-Case Analysis, Health Research, Narrative Methods, Evidence-Based Practice.*

1.Introduction

The modern healthcare research environment is created under the pressure of the evidence-based approach that can be utilized in various clinical environments and among different populations with the required efficiency. In this paradigm, the ability to generalize research discoveries outside the narrow scope of research studies has been converted into a major criteria of assessing quality and pragmatism of qualitative inquiries in nursing and allied fields. The issue of the transferability of qualitative research is an old problem, and it determines the development of methodological approaches and the recognition of qualitative evidence within the context of evidence-based practice. Although traditional qualitative methodologies succeeded in availing sufficient contextual information and excellent perceptions of human experiences, it has always been criticized because of its little potential able to apply broadly and generalize to the larger population(1).

Innovation in methodology as applied in qualitative research has been given a great deal of consideration, which has resulted in elaborate methods that seek to combine the intensity of qualitative research with the widespread demanded in the course of the healthcare environment. One study that is very promising in accordance to the newly introduced methodologies is the multiple case narrative approach that eliminates most of the fundamental and inherent limitations present in traditional qualitative research models. Such methodology is a paradigm shift to classical single-case or small group collective case studies and is a more holistic study using larger samples and a richness in context as found in qualitative research.

The importance of this methodological innovation is hard to overestimate when it comes to contemporary healthcare delivery where practitioners are getting more and more interested in research evidence to make their decisions in healthcare delivery and develop policies. In the past, dialectic between quantitative research, which

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relies on statistical generalizability versus qualitative research, which emphasizes contextual knowledge and transferability has made it difficult to combine some forms of evidence in a given practice by healthcare professionals. The multiple case narrative approach coming out as a possible way to overcome this methodological gap provides the researcher with the possibility to carry out qualitative studies that, in principle, will lead to the development of results with a greater value of transferability, leaving intact the sense of depth and sensitivity in context that defines qualitative work of high quality.

Qualitative research shifts from narrow to broad applicability.



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FIGURE 1 Qualitative research shifts from narrow to broad applicability

Moreover, the changing character of healthcare issues, such as the rise of the complexity of patient population, the deoverallization of healthcare provision patterns, and the intersection of patient-oriented care also requires research approaches retaining the complexity of healthcare difficulties but yielding results that could be applied to various findings. The approach focusing on systematic analysis of multiple cases and on the discovery of patterns in a wide variety of context is multiple case narrative, which provides a methodological framework to be applied when facing such modern research problems. Such a method allows researchers to look at events in different aspects, consider the variety of experiences of the participants and outline similarities and differences leading to a more extensive way to understand the research findings and apply them to a wider context.

The theoretical foundations of multiple case narrative approach are based on constructivist epistemology with knowledge constructed socially, and thus the possibility of discerning patterns and links between them that go beyond the single-case study(2). This philosophical framework helps to establish a strong base to do the research which is methodologically sound and practically applicable and equips the researchers with the means to move among the complicated field of qualitative research as well as fulfilling the requirements of evidence that can be used to guide to practice and policy making. The systematic focus of the methodology, which allows them to handle a greater sample size than conventional qualitative methods, makes the methodology a potential addition to the arsenal of methodologies that nurses and other healthcare investigators can use in the process of developing evidence, which is both context-based and generalizable.

2.Theoretical Backgrounds and Research Methodology

The theoretical framework on which multiple case narrative is based is an advanced amalgam of constructivist theory and a utilized set of systematic analytical procedures that aim at increasing the transferability potential of qualitative research findings. In essence, such a framework depends on the conventional wisdom that qualitative research inevitably swings the pendulum in favor of either broader contextual analysis at the expense of detailed case-based analysis or vice versa, offering instead a framework that makes it possible to conduct in both detail and breadth. The objective of reifying the constructivist-narrative premise of this methodology is to be able to reflect the subjectivity on human experience, and accepting the perspective that it is possible to identify the patterns and

relationships which are not confined to the single narratives, by systematically comparing and analysing a collection of cases.

The methodological structure of the multiple case narrative research stands out among likeminded ones and might be attributed to its distinctive range of within-case and cross-case analysis processes. In contrast to the traditional collective case study approaches that usually test a rather small number of cases in extreme detail, the multiple case narrative methodology is supposed to handle considerably larger sample sizes and still retain the analytic rigor and the contextual sensitivity. This scaling capacity is a crucial development of the approach of qualitative research, offering investigators the opportunity to research phenomena which occur in a broad range of settings and on a large scale, without compromising the rich, detailed comprehension fundamental to excellent qualitative study.

The systematic qualities of the multiple case narrative analytical process contrasts with the strong interpretive qualities of other qualitative methods, which can be very intuitive and dependent on the interpretation of the researcher. The methodology reflects an analytical model based on four stages that help a researcher maneuver through more advanced forms of analysis, starting with simple data categorization and progressing to the theoretical interpretation of data(3). This systemic method gives a definite guide to data analysis but continues to offer enough flexibility to support the contingent course of qualitative inquiry and variations in circumstances that various situations and cases exhibit.

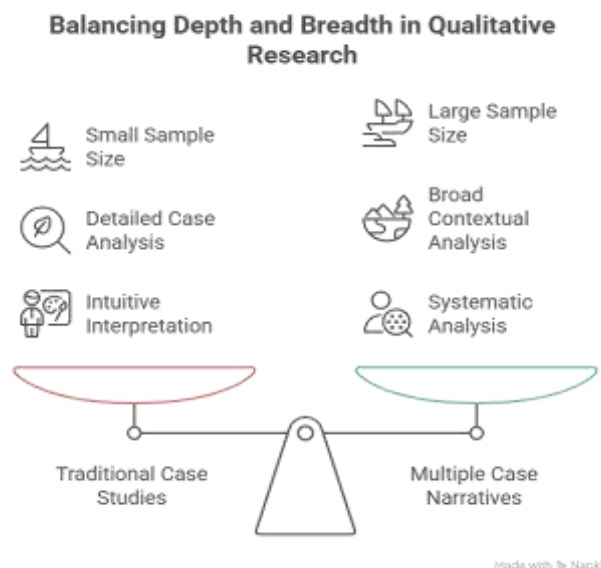


FIGURE 2 Balancing Depth and Breadth in Qualitative Research

The focus on associational analysis here is one of the most innovative aspects of the methodology as it allows the researchers to find the patterns to be used and the relations between cases without letting down the individual situation and unique parameters of the cases. Such an associational approach allows discovering causal patterns and links between categories produced as a result of many cases analysis, which can support a higher level of transferability, which can be provided even when it is not traditionally relevant to qualitative research. The way systematic characterization of the categories and relationships in cases is being mapped helps the researcher to accomplish the similarities and differences in the phenomena which results into a rich and more detailed description that could be used in policy and practice in different contexts.

In addition, the multiple case narrative approach has taken on board the components of traditional approaches to qualitative inquiry and dealt with the limitations inherent in them. The methodology has the advantage of using grounded theory procedures of systematic data analysis without being bound by limitations of theoretical sampling which are characteristic of grounded theory research, therefore, providing researchers a more flexibility about the choice of participants and data acquisition(4). This will be aided by allowing researchers to work with bigger sample sizes, by allowing them to capture more variety in terms of experiences and context in which the participants are caught by the research hopefully as a result of this, better representations and transferability of

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research findings can be achieved at little cost to depth and context sensitivity that good qualitative inquiry needs to maintain.

3. Techniques and Strategy of Implementation Analytical Procedures

When it comes to the realization of multiple case narrative research, a complex knowledge of the peculiarities of this research study and the systematic way of researching that stands unique among other qualitative methods is necessary. The four-stage analytical procedure offers a structured and flexible structure to the data analysis procedure that tends to be comprehensive step by step with complexity and theoretical model to the research data and participant experience at the same time. At the first level of analysis, the researchers only aim at the fragmentation and codification of data regarding individual cases without giving priority to coherence or consistency, thereby gaining a general disposition to the material, as well as retaining the original features of each case story.

Mapping stage is a crucial state in the analytical process when researchers, who used to concentrate on individual cases, obtaining a collective overview of all the cases at once. This phase involves advanced analytical ability because researchers need to be able to establish common links among categories without forgetting that there are differences and differentiation among various cases. The classified mapping of categories and relations where they exist will create the possibility to recognize occurring patterns and connections that could guide the knowledge on the phenomenon being investigated on a larger scale. This step especially plays to the strengths of specialised qualitative data analysis tools which are able to support the handling and analysis of large amounts of data as well as aid the comparative technique that is necessary in the approach.

The focused stage of analysis basically follows all the other stages of the systematic analytical process in which researchers synthesize their study findings into a consistent meaning, or core categories, which will reflect the phenomenon they are studying. This step needs sophisticated analytical abilities of the researcher who must engage in the process of determining the most meaningful patterns of relationships keeping a sense of originality of data and experiences of the participants. The determination of core categories is the basis of obtaining findings that may be potentially transferable to other situations and populations with the contextual richness, which attributes high-quality qualitative studies(5).

What is optional is the theoretical step of analysis through which the researcher gets a chance to expand his or her results on to a higher positive plain much more on to a theoretical level of explaining in-depth and widening meanings. It is the step whereby the results of the research are systematically compared with previously known theory and literature in order that the researchers can place their findings into the larger spectrum of scholarship, as well as to determine where their findings add new knowledge or to contradict theory regarding the subject matter. The possibility to avoid this stage or incorporate it depending on the research goals give the researchers flexibility in their implementation as well as showing flexibility in their methodology.

Agents of various case narrative research with multiple implementation should also pay sufficient attention to the selection and recruitment of such participants as could contribute to achieving the aims of the methodology in terms of improved transferability and applicability. The research in question is inflicted with employing purposive sampling schemes aimed at yielding maximum variation of characteristics and experiences among the participants so that the researchers can test the phenomena in various contexts and among different populations. Although this sampling is not consistent with conventional probabilistic sampling procedures, this method has some benefits in terms of it allows capturing diversity and complexity present in the real-world phenomena whereas enabling it to establish the basis of the heightened transferability of the research results.

4. Generalizability and Transferability Potential

Potential to transfer findings to practice and policy is one of the most important strengths of the multiple case narrative methodology since it provides the researcher with the ability to develop results that can be either used in practice or policy outside of the context of the particular cases and the population that it has studied on an individual bearer (6). The approach to the concept of transferability in the methodology includes three unique types of generalizations as following: generalization case-to-case, analytical generalization and generalization sample-to-population. Such a multi-faceted concept of transferability presents researchers with a variety of avenues by which they can illustrate the more general applicability of what they have presented whether it is in

their own field of study or it is a study conducted in a different field but displaying the contextual sensitivity that made effective qualitative research.

This is the most conventional version of qualitative generalization, which is concerned with the extent to which the results of one setting can be used to derive lessons in other comparable situations. This type of transferability is further boosted by the multiple case narrative methodology since it systematically compares multiple cases and identifies common patterns that are beyond the context of a single case. The study of phenomena in various cases, including their identification of commonalities and differences, allows researchers to offer more solid grounds to the case-to-case transferability than more common single-case or small-scale collective case studies. This improvement in the grounds of transferability empowers practitioners and policymakers to make research findings more aptly applicable to comparable cases and contexts.

Analytical generalization is more refined category of transferability which centers on theoretical concepts and frameworks that arise out of research as opposed to empirical findings. The structured system of analytical operations and a focus on the pattern detection characteristic of the multiple case narrative methodology allow formulating a very grounded analytical generalization because it allows the researcher to form the theoretical ideas, which would be generalizable in many contexts and to different populations. The ability of the methodology to assist in determining associations between categories and generating central categories that reflect important characteristics of phenomena is helpful in facilitating creation of theoretical knowledge that can be applied to practice and research regarding other fields of thoughts(7).

The possibility of generalization between the sample and the population is, perhaps, the most ambitious statement of the several case narration mode because it implies that information on the much-purposively selected sample can benefit the broader generalizations about the population. The approach which makes this kind of generalization possible is the ability of the methodology to achieve higher sample size as compared to typical qualitative methods which give the researchers an opportunity to amass a wide range of diversity in terms of participants experiences and other subsets of characteristics. The existence of multiple cases and patterns enables them to be systematically analysed which can form the basis of relationships and associations that could be present not only within the sample under analysis but it could also give rise to some sort of generalisation which would be related to quantitative methods of research.

Transferability that is attained in the approach of the methodology is also reinforced with references to systematic documentation and clear analytical processes that allow the readers to assess where in their context and situations the findings apply. The thorough portrayal of categories and interrelationships, the employment of quotations of the participants and the thick description enables readers to obtain the information that is sufficient to enable them to determine the relevance and applicability of the findings of the research to the particular situation. This openness and completeness of documentation helps the methodology have a better chance of improved transferability since decisions regarding the application of research findings in various contexts can be made intelligently.

5. Modern Uses and Prospects

The usage of multiple case narrative methodology at the practical level in different fields of healthcare and social sciences proves its flexibility to be applied and its abilities to answer different research questions and be methodologically rigorous and analytically sophisticated. More recent applications of this approach have been in the field of educational research and foundations where the method has been used by researcher to study the intricate and chaotic process of involving multi stakeholders and exploring a number of different educational systems. These applications have shown that the methodology possesses the ability to seize the complexity of the educational processes, but yields the results with a potential to inform policy and practice in new settings and on diverse populations.

In healthcare research, its methodology has been particularly promising in studying complex phenomena where there is involvement of many healthcare providers, heterogeneous patient populations, and also different variations in healthcare delivery (8). This ability to work with higher sample sizes and still introspectively analyze a given topic is what renders the approach very suitable in the study of healthcare phenomena that can best be represented in large sample population and yet the contextual sensitivity to insightfully comment on the complexity of processes involved in healthcare. The latest use in nursing research has shown the possibility of the methodology conducting a study of the professional transition processes, healthcare delivery models, and the phenomena of patient experience within various healthcare environments.

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The strong focus on systematic examination and recognition of patterns makes the specified methodology especially useful when it comes to dealing with modern healthcare issues which may involve the need to comprehend the phenomenon in a variety of contexts and demographics. Even such issue as the improvement of healthcare quality, patient safety programs, and care coordination mechanisms frequently incorporate deep interplay of various stakeholders and systems, and as such, they provide promising candidates of study based on multiple case narratives methods. The ability of the methodology to detect patterns, trends and relationships among all cases without losing the contextual understanding may help to create more effective interventions and policies, which might be effective in various medical settings.

Further progress in multiple case narrative methodology may follow the progress of technology and computational procedures capable of performing the systematic analysis that can be necessitated by the methodology in qualitative data analysis. Interaction of artificial intelligence and machine learning methods with conventional qualitative analysis processes subjected to analysis can potentially increase the ability of the method to capture the patterns and connection within substantial datasets without sacrificing the contextual awareness that is the hallmark of high-quality qualitative analysis. The methodology can be implemented with the help of such advances in technology as they can give the researchers more advanced tools of data control and analysis.

The increased promotion of the mixed-methods research practices in social science and healthcare studies offers further scope on the opportunity of combining multiple case narrative method with quantitative data research techniques. SOP of analytical procedures and the emphasis on pattern identification, the methodology is especially compatible with quantitative variants and may help the researchers to form a more extensive picture of complex phenomena as researchers may satisfy both depth and breadth objectives. Such a blending has the potential to build more solid evidence foundations capable of supporting evidence-based practice as well as dealing with the complexity, diversity, which come to characterize modern healthcare settings and issues.

6.Conclusion and Future work

With the development of evidence-based healthcare, it is becoming the norm that research be used as a driver in clinical practice, policy, and edification; that both qualitative and quantitative research is considered. It is against this background that the concept of generalisation in the qualitative research has emerged as a source of conflict but an essential theory. In practice, qualitative inquiry has traditionally overlooked breadth in favour of what might be described as context rich, nuanced meaning over general abstraction. Nevertheless, the need of effective, transferable knowledge has shown qualitative researchers to rethink the way in which their findings can have a voice beyond the immediate scope of a particular case. This challenges are overcome by a systematic constructivist-narrative approach to the multiple case which is uniquely positioned to support different types of generalisation such as case-to-case generalisation, analytical generalisation, and sample-to-population generalisation.

Multiple case narrative method The multiple case narrative method which was initially developed by Shkedi (2005), is founded on measure of constructivist paradigm which places emphasis on subjectivity, contextual meaning, and voice of participants. Simultaneously, it introduces an analytical rigor enabling the researcher to work with much larger, and more diversified sample than most qualitative research practices would allow. This rich narrative inquiry, coupled with systematically categorising and cross-case comparison, allows MCN analysis to develop both breadth and depth of analysis. It allows researchers to preserve the contextual peculiarities of the individual cases and at the same time recognize common patterns and overall insights in several narratives. This dual capacity enhances the possibility of the findings being able to generalise to other likeminded or environments or populations, hence, making the qualitative research on the whole more credible and effective.

There is no overstating the significance of generalisability as far as the sphere of nursing and health sciences is concerned. Multifaceted and dynamic environment in which health professionals engage in health care requires well-founded context-sensitive evidence on decisions. The MCN approach offers an exceptional methodological tool that corresponds to these needs, which can entail an empirical investigation into a lived experience and produce the results that are generalizable and extendable to circumstances that are outside the context of the research. It does this through the incorporation of the views of a great number of participants and through the identification of associations among the emergent categories in thematic fashion. Such way of working with the big data sets, as the case in the study where NVivo software was used made it possible to compare several case narratives and yield meaningful conceptual conclusions.

The major advantages of the MCN approach are the possibility to grasp the systematic pattern by referring to the variety of cases without sacrificing the integrity of personal experiences. The method allows researchers to shift the data-based coding into the conceptual theorisation through a four-stage analysis process, which includes the initial, mapping, focused and theoretical respectively. Such shift between descriptive and analytical insight allows to reveal deeper, usually quite obscure connections between categories and experiences of participants. Through this, not only the approach will result into theoretical development but it will also improve the application of findings into the practice.

Given these advantages, multiple case narrative approach does not lack its limitations. Having a big amount of cases might potentially result in the loss of contextual specificity, as it becomes challenging to grasp the depth of a unique and individual story. Additionally, the rare themes might not be common during the cross-case analysis or will be there in insufficient numbers. Risks represent a practical reason to be sensitive and analytically balanced in methodology. However, with all its rigour and properly associated with adequate tools, MCN can contribute to better and more generalisable and important qualitative findings.

The research carried out by Safari et al. (2023) is a good example of the illustration of the effective utilization of such a methodology. With their exploration of the experiences of internationally qualified nursing students during the registration process in Australia, the scholars showed how MCN can help to confirm a variety of attitudes and identify structural constraints that would tie several instances. The results added important insights on the multifaceted nature of professional transition and the similarities as well as differences in the journey. The access of a sound process of categorisation and mapping made the emergent themes anchored to the participant narrative but, still, maintained analytical coherence.

Today, as qualitative researchers find themselves in the search of the ways to strike a fair balance between the contextual richness and the applicability of the endeavor, the multiple case narrative approach presents an alluring alternative. It allows researchers to react to the increasing need of generalisable qualitative data, especially in the fields of nursing, public health, and education, where phenomena aren't usually simple and uniform in nature. Through this type of methodology, scholars will be able to offer a more connected and influential body of qualitative knowledge one that adequately draws on human experience as well as one that reflects policy and practice.

Recommendations and Future directions

To conclude, in the future, a number of valuable development aspects can be further used to enhance the usefulness and rigour of the multiple case narrative approach. To begin with, it is a necessity to implement MCN to a wider extent within the realm of health-related research. It has not been explored much in the nursing, medicine, mental health, and allied health, although it has found its niche in educational research. Sharing this approach will allow it to support the same problematic areas in these areas as in the past, including knowledge of patient-provider relations, facility with frameworks of control, or assessment of healthcare transits among people in expectant groups.

To facilitate more growth, future researchers should be directed to consider improving best practices in MCN on managing and analyzing data. The versatile and large data sets demand highly engaged analytic structures and computer applications. Further utilization of qualitative data analysis such as NVivo, MAXQDA, or Atlas.ti can assist the researcher to better work with categories and coding, as well as conducting a cross-case comparison. Also, the use of artificial intelligence and natural language processing tools can be potentially explored to provide the means of speeding and scaling qualitative analysis without reducing the integrity of the methodology.

The other important recommendation would be to elaborate on a better methodological guideline and reporting standards of multiple case narrative studies. With the rise in the popularity of the approach, it will be necessary to create consistency and transparency in its implementation. It involves providing a description of sampling plans, a description of the analytic processes, and making decisions on the grounds of inclusion of the cases and formation of categories. The critical reflection on the limitations of the study, especially regarding representativeness and any bias coming with interpretation of the data should also be encouraged by the researchers.

Methodological contrasts of MCN to yet further generalisation-oriented coherences-- e.g. case survey, collective case study, and meta-ethnography-- may also be instructive. With a systematic assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of these methods to the various research contexts the scholars are in a better position to choose more effectively the most suitable tools to be used towards their particular needs. Comparative research based

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investigations may aid in explaining the distinctive offerings of MCN and achieve innovation in qualitative research method.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare

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