

## SCRUTINY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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### ABSTRACT

*Grounded theory approach is considered as one of qualitative research methods. In this study conducted, firstly, it is attempted to express the general framework of the issue by explaining the qualitative research. Then, in the second section, grounded theory approach is described in extensive detail. In the third section, the implementation process of grounded theory approach is scrutinized in two dimensions. In this way, the implementation process of grounded theory approach in the social sciences has been scrutinized in full detail. Thus, elucidating the place of grounded theory approach in the social sciences, it is held out much hope of increasing the implementation frequency, and, therefore this study can be consulted as a guide.*

**Keywords:** *Grounded Theory, Qualitative Research, Research Methods*

## SOSYAL BİLİMLERDE KURAM OLUŞTURMA YAKLAŞIMININ İŞLEYİŞ SÜRECİNİN İRDELENMESİ

### ÖZET

*Kuram oluşturma yaklaşımı nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden biri olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Gerçekleştirilen bu çalışmada öncelikle nitel araştırma açıklanarak konunun genel çerçevesi ifade edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Daha sonra ikinci kısımda kuram oluşturma yaklaşımı tüm yönleriyle anlatılmıştır. Üçüncü kısımda ise kuram oluşturma yaklaşımının işleyiş süreci iki boyutuyla irdelenmiştir. Bu sayede sosyal bilimlerde kuram oluşturma yaklaşımının uygulama süreci tüm detaylarıyla irdelenmiştir. Böylece, sosyal bilimlerde kuram oluşturma yaklaşımının yerinin*

*belirginleşerek uygulanma sıklığının daha da artacağı ve bu çalışmanın da bir rehber görevi göreceği umut edilmektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kuram oluşturma, nitel araştırma, araştırma yöntemleri

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In today's world, the frequency of using qualitative research methods is on the increase as the days go by. Grounded theory approach is also a qualitative research method that gains much momentum with each passing day. Of interest in this study that is examined and scrutinized according to a systematic perspective in grounded theory approach, it is hoped that this approach will become even more well-known subject.

The importance of qualitative research methods is better understood in recent years, and the interest in this issue has increased day by day. Grounded theory approach, a qualitative research method, is also an important approach that treats the natural social phenomenon by using a classifying principle.

In this study, all the processes of implementation stages of grounded theory approach are scrutinized in detail, and, thus, grounded theory approach is tried to put succinctly. Thanks to this study carried out, the place of grounded theory approach in the social sciences is expected to increase in the implementation frequency by creating an even better place, and acting as a basic guide to the relevant studies, especially in the areas such as sociology, psychology, and behavioral sciences.

Upon this study carried out, it is aimed to investigate the place of grounded theory approach thoroughly in the social sciences. In addition to that, this study set out to be seen as a guide to grounded theory approach in the social sciences. At the same time, dealing with grounded theory approach, the increasing usage will be provided not only in the field of health sciences, but also in the field of social sciences. In other words, it is aimed to do a further increase in the implementation frequency of grounded theory approach.

Grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method as clearly explained above. In this study carried out, first, the subject of qualitative research is considered and it is tried to investigate thoroughly in great detail. Then, in the second stage, grounded theory approach is considered as regards its foundations and general scope. Third, the implementation process of grounded theory approach in the social sciences has been scrutinized in detail, forming on a conceptual basis. Here, what are presented, that a direction and a point of view, related to the implementation process of grounded theory approach. At the same time, this study carried out, forms a guide to grounded theory approach.

## **II. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

### **A. The Birth of Qualitative Research**

The origin of qualitative research has been gone back until in the early 20th century. First example of qualitative research was realized in anthropology and sociology which contained information about human life (Yıldırım, 2010: 80).

The late 19th century and the early 20th century form the basis for the use of qualitative research in the area of social research. Le Play's study, which is related to families and communities in Europe in 1853, contains the traces of the first real participatory observations. Anthropological fieldwork is also materialized at the beginning of the 20th century. It can be stated that Baas and Malinowski are the first persons who established the appropriate studies on anthropological efforts. In America between the years 1910-1940, Chicago School also had a certain amount of influence in the way qualitative methods became popular. During this time, participatory observation studies related to city life have been materialized. After this period, in the 1940s and 1950s, the interest to qualitative methodology has been decreased. The use of qualitative methods has increased again after 1960, and today, there is a high level of interest to qualitative research methods (Tarkun, 2000: 29). The use of qualitative research in the social sciences is in a steady increase in the last twenty-five years (Kuş, 2007: 20).

### **B. Definition and Scope of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research can be expressed as a research, which qualitative data collection methods are used such as observations, interviews and document analyses, and it is a research followed by a qualitative process that perceptions and incidents are realistically and holistically process-oriented in the natural environment (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008: 39). According to the exhaustive definition made by Denzel and Lincoln (1998), the qualitative research is a kind of inquiry that the issue, or issues are examined by researchers in their natural environment, and, thus, there's an attempt to clarify and interpret the phenomenon, from the point of view of meanings assigned by people who have been investigated (Ekiz, 2004: 429).

Qualitative research is the process of getting the information deeply, rather than largely in order to succeed in analyzing, and directly collecting the non-numeric data in the first place. Quantitative research is associated with questions such as *how much*, *how many* and *how often*, while qualitative research is associated with questions such as *why*, *how* and *what way*. In addition, quantitative research usually follows deductive methods, whereas qualitative research usually involves inductive methods (Coleman and O'Connor, 2007: 655). The main focal point of qualitative research is the level of integration between presentation of data and its description. While making a statement, sometimes, perceptions of different approaches may occur in different interpretations (Heath and Cowley, 2004: 143).

Qualitative researchers form a basis for the view, that the world is made up of a lot of facts, and people's view of the world can be based on a variety of personal opinions. Qualitative researchers are quite flexible in terms of methods, strategies used by them and the overall research process. The models that are to be used in the survey, the stages of process are revealed in the flow of research, and they are developed. The purpose of qualitative research can be

expressed as trying to understand the situations and the incidents from the participants' perspective. Therefore, participants are likely to take part in the research, often directly. The advantages of qualitative research include: reflecting the whole reality of special events, facilitating the production of theories and the results, reflecting the understanding of very different factors in the environment and accordingly the applicability of research results is at larger amount (Saruhan and Yıldız, 2009: 342).

Qualitative research is a technique that explores the specific phenomena and incidents deeply and fully, in their natural environment, within a long period of time (Saban, 2007: 469). Qualitative research methods are an area, which is complex, variable, disputatious, and where many methods and research implementations are present. Qualitative research is therefore, not a single entity, but an umbrella term offering a wide variety (Punch, 2005: 132). Qualitative research method of analysis may not be expressed as simple. Qualitative research starts in the unformatted data under extensive conditions, and this case has been linked to the researcher's background knowledge, the purpose of the study and the research strategy (Mehmetoğlu and Altınay, 2006: 14).

In the process of qualitative research, the researcher makes progress as if he has little or no knowledge of human nature and the places he visits. The plan succeeds as a result of direct interaction with people, places, and the other data. Detailed processes are not significant. It is believed that the questions are achieved during the research. The study itself undertakes the research. Researchers do not determine their data as accurate or raw, but they try to illustrate key aspects of the research (Tarkun, 2000: 31).

Qualitative research is focused on people's opinion, experiences, perceptions, emotions. The cases are investigated with holistic view. Qualitative research describes the social events in natural environments, but the observer's effect is also considered (Saruhan and Özdemirci, 2011: 236-237).

According to Lincoln and Denzel, qualitative research is expressed as a method which focuses on a certain point, very methodical and adopting the interpretive approach to the problem of research (Altunışık, Coşkun, Bayraktaroğlu and Yıldırım, 2005: 237). Methods followed in qualitative research can retain different features. According to the nature of the question to be explored, some other different methods such as discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, observation, and document analysis can also be used in qualitative research (Koçel, 2010: 33).

The research process, which is generally followed in qualitative research, is the method called "from specific to more general," namely, "the method of induction." Generally, the qualitative researcher formulates the concepts, meanings, and relationships based on interviews, observations and documents. Qualitative research tackles the matter of people's interpretation of the events and involves the results via rich descriptions and explanations. For

the classification of qualitative research methods, Creswell (1998) classifies the most common five qualitative research traditions as biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study (Işıkoğlu, 2005: 159-160).

Qualitative research is defined as understanding the information generation process about people's life styles, behaviors, organizational structures and social change (Özdemir, 2010: 325). Qualitative researchers use all types of data which include numerical measurements, photographs, indirect observation, texting (Stake, 2010: 89).

### **III. GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH**

#### **A. The History of Grounded Theory Approach**

Grounded theory was developed in the 1960s and it was created by two sociologists: Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser. Anselm Strauss came from the University of Chicago, frequently referred as the Chicago School of sociology, which had an important history in qualitative research methods. Glaser recognized the need for a regular set of techniques and procedures for coding and testing in qualitative research methods (Eaves, 2001: 655). Grounded theory approach was developed in the early 1960s by Glaser and Strauss during an observational research based on hospital staff members' handling of dying patients (Strauss, 1987: 5).

Grounded theory has a short history of five major publications. Glaser and Strauss began jointly a study in the field of medical sociology (in hospital) based on "death" and they published two studies. After publishing the book named "Awareness of Dying," these authors wrote a book in response to the question raised by readers: "How did you do?" and in this book, the methods used and developed in death studies, are described in detail. This book was published in 1967 under the title "The Discovery of Grounded Theory," and it became the first book in which the method of grounded theory was described. The second major publication came in under the name "Theoretical Sensitivity" 11 years later in 1978 by Glaser. The later methodological study was conducted after nine years. Strauss' study called "Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists" was the third major publication arrived in 1987. The fourth major publication was the book named "Basics of Qualitative Research, Strauss and Corbin, 1990." Glaser had a response to that book, and he published his subtitled book named "Emergence vs. Forcing" that in which he criticized Strauss and Corbin's book "Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis" which is written in 1992. These five publications show the history of grounded theory development (Punch, 2005: 157).

Grounded theory approach is mentioned because of the studies done by Glaser and Strauss, in the field of health sciences. Glaser and Strauss have done various studies on the interaction between professionals working in the field of health care and patients living on borrowed time, therefore Glaser and Strauss managed to identify the results based on the data acquired and the various aspects of this interaction. In these studies conducted, new statements have been

obtained in connection with new concepts, and the interaction between employees and patients. In other words, an elucidative theory was created on the basis of the data. For example, in these studies, the emotional stages that the patients pass through who are dying, were expressed as rejection, anger, acceptance and reconciliation. These stages were observed in the majority of patients, and for this reason, this feature was confirmed as a theory pertaining to this process (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008: 76).

### **B. General Scope of Grounded Theory**

According to Bachman and Kyngas, grounded theory is expressed as an approach to develop a theory by using the technique of induction in qualitative studies. Induction is the process of discovering a general principle from a set of propositions and observations usually obtained by experience. Glaser and Strauss developed “grounded theory” because of the reason that researchers are usually hold the extant theories and refrain from creating new ones, in the field of social sciences, in the development of grounded theory approach. Grounded theory can be expressed as a method of discovering new issues and phenomena that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Also, Glaser and Strauss framed describing the grounded theory that it should include logical coherence and logical explanation. Therefore, grounded theory is equivalent to the concept of causality (Yüksel, Mil and Bilim, 2007: 45-47).

Grounded theory is a new strategy that is developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, and it is suggested for the sociological theories to be produced. This theory has been used successfully throughout the last forty years and it consists of a continuous confirmation of systematic data collection and their analysis. Grounded theory is implemented in various areas including the fields of business and marketing. Grounded theory approach can be considered to include two questions, firstly, “What is the basic problem with the particular area and in what way the changes are estimated in the process of the problem?” and secondly, “What is the category or what are the categorical features included in the specified incident?” These questions are asked continuously in the process of empirical comparison of data, data coding and data analysis (Wagner, Lukassen and Mahlendorf, 2010: 7).

Grounded theory is widely used in the diversity of social science disciplines. Grounded theory approach can be expressed as an inductive phenomenon which is used in qualitative research methods and developed by passing through various stages (Kim, Eves and Scarles, 2009: 424).

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that is followed by proposing a theory, rather than testing the existent theory (Kan and Parry, 2004: 470). Grounded theory approach is based on Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism. The theory is gradually developed through participants' effective views and the natural interaction of each other. The theory suggested by the participants on the basis of their statements, is stabilized at their movements and the interactions of others (Chiovitti, 2008: 205).

Grounded theory researchers in whom they are interested: they usually act in the way of observing these people including the experiences, attitudes and the moments when they speak and listen to them (Rennie, 2006: 64). Grounded theory approach is founded on two basic principles, although being a method used in philosophical and sociological context. The first principle pertains to change. Since phenomena are not conceived of as static but as continually changing in response to evolving conditions. The second principle pertains to a clear stand on the issue of “determinism”. Strict determinism is not accepted, as is non-determinism (Corbin and Strauss, 1990: 5).

The methodological plunge of the grounded theory approach to qualitative data is through the development of theory, without any special commitment to specific kinds of data, lines of research, or theoretical interests. So, it is not truly a specific method or technique (Strauss, 1987: 5).

#### **IV. SCRUTINY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Scrutiny of the implementation process of grounded theory approach can be displayed in two dimensions. These dimensions are expressed as data collection and data analysis.

##### **A. The Process of Data Collection**

Data collection is an important part of the implementation process of grounded theory approach. Data collection is performed through various data collection methods. If the number of data collection methods is increased, then the research’s acceptance can be reinforced.

The data in grounded theory approach often include interviews, observations, written materials such as logs, or a combination of these methods. In this approach, using a mixed method is the best. Having advantages over other qualitative methods in data analysis regarding the process of certainty and research design, is the main reason for the use of grounded theory approach. One of significant aspects of this method is that grounded theory, in the phase of data collection, carries out the self-assessment of data (Yüksel, Mil and Bilim, 2007: 63 - 67).

In grounded theory approach, data are basically collected in three main categories. These are; field notes, the data came from interviews (notes, records, quoted materials) and handwritten notes, or temporary notes suitable for research. The basic data source of grounded theory approach is the information received from interviews (Douglas, 2003: 46).

In accordance with the method of constant comparison, researchers shall strive to identify the underlying theme of the incident as a result of what has been obtained by interviews, observations or other methods when compared to each other. The progress is achieved through the creation of categories by paying attention to the similarities and differences and the underlying conditions of the research, in which the phenomena are couched. The process of grounded theory approach not only explains the social phenomena, but also

reflects the way of carrying out the actions during the research (Pettigrew, 2002: 112-113).

In grounded theory approach, data are principally collected by interviews, observations and document analysis. Glaser and Strauss have used the name as “constant comparison analysis” for the process of grounded theory. In this process, the data are analyzed immediately after its collection, and the emerging concepts, phenomena and processes are involved in the later stages of data collection. In this process, as a data-gathering instrument, various forms of interviews or observations are in semi-structured state, especially in the first stage of data collection, and until the end of data collection process it does not take its final form (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008: 76).

The data are usually collected by using interviews, observations, diaries or other written documents or a combination of some other methods. The grounded theory literature is the basis for the need to combine many data collection methods (Backman and Kyngas, 1999: 149).

### **B. The Process of Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a major part of the implementation process of grounded theory approach. In this part, present data is compared with each other. Thus, it can be attempted to reach the theory. In this part, code, category and other facts are examined in suitable forms.

Grounded theory approach is a kind of methodology that is not a well-known and pertains to the development of a new theory. On the basis of grounded theory approach, the idea of proposing a new theory is emerged. In line with the principles of grounded theory approach, the theory is gradually developed throughout the research process, on the other hand data collection and data analysis are in the presence of a continuous interaction with each other, and accordingly the theory is tried to be developed as a result of that (Goulding, 1998: 51).

Grounded theory approach, by comparison and the analysis of data collection, by the development of codes and categories, involves the development of the theory, rather than its testing throughout the process (Mottram, 2010: 4). Grounded theory is a method of qualitative research and highlights the importance of the production of theory based on data (Mutsheva, 2010: 215).

The way which used in grounded theory, is the gradual development of theory throughout the research process, and the continuous production of outcome as a result of the interplay between data analysis and data collection, rather than the view of how the theory may be conceptualized (Coleman and O'Connor, 2008: 774). Douglas points out that the data itself is not theorized, but its form which is created in grounded theory approach (McAdam, Leonard, Henderson, and Hazlett, 2008: 827).

In general, grounded theory approach theorists are in act to categorize the data in a systematic way concerning the categories of phenomena to which the



data are related. This case leads to the development of a process, which creates a complete picture or a story. Immediately after the later analyses, the content-based phenomena will begin to emerge (Kempster and Parry, 2011: 108).

During grounded theory approach, replication takes place as a result of the reciprocal relationship among data collection, data analysis and theorization. These processes take place simultaneously and are known as constant comparison method of analysis, and this event is the basic philosophy of grounded theory approach. Grounded theory approach includes constant comparisons specified by the researcher, data collection in a more continuous fashion, the comparison between new and old categories of data, the massive amounts of data collected and analyzed and the theoretical relationships among variables. This is what Silverman has suggested, that the constant comparison analysis or “analytic induction” is the root of the validity for the research (Parry, 1998: 89).

According to Glaser (1992), when grounded theory approach is in process; researchers, first, must start to collect data in the chosen field, and immediately afterwards the coding, constant comparison and they must perform the activities of re-encoding. When there is the integration of category and its features, they can begin the literature review. Stern (1980) and Glaser (1992) express that if you first do the literature review, you will ruin the data by directing the researchers towards the places, which are irrelevant to the topic. In addition, Streubert and Carpenter (1999) point out that the researchers should turn to the literature when the theory is started to develop (Chen and Boore, 2009: 2253).

In three stages the grounded theory approach solution takes place. First, the conceptual categories of data must be established. In the second, the relations between these categories should be developed. Third, it can be expressed as the conceptualization and explanation of these relationships at a higher level of abstraction (Punch, 2005: 199).

In grounded theory approach, the researchers use a process in which the established categories and additional information are constantly compared to each other. The researcher continues to ask instances of that category until no more information can be discovered. This approach is recognized as constant comparative analysis (Crook and Kumar, 1998: 76).

Grounded theorists have defined three styles of coding. In open coding, which is used at the beginning, “the analyst is related to generating categories and their feature”; in axial coding, “categories are systematically developed and connected with subcategories”; and in selective coding analysts are related to “the process of integrating and refining categories”. These three styles of coding can be accompanied by process coding (Yin, 2011: 187). An essence category is created after codes, and categories are crumpled through a process of integration and axial coding (Drury, Francis and Chapman, 2008: 785).

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method. It's a method that is created from the basic principles of qualitative research methods. In the study, first, qualitative research study is discussed. In the second section, grounded theory approach is investigated thoroughly in great detail. In the third part, the implementation process of grounded theory approach is tried to express in full detail.

Upon this study carried out, the place of grounded theory approach in the social sciences is tried to be elucidated and investigated thoroughly, and its whole process has been scrutinized in integrity.

In this study, grounded theory approach, a qualitative research method, has been scrutinized according to a strategic perspective including its whole implementation processes in detail. At the same time, the implementation processes of grounded theory approach have been scrutinized on a holistic view. As a result, the scrutiny of grounded theory approach has been set out by including a holistic view, presenting a guide pertaining to its processes, and forming its rationale behind the field of social sciences.

The importance and the implementation of this approach, that can be used in the social sciences, especially in areas such as sociology, psychology and behavioral sciences, are described in full detail. Thus, grounded theory approach in which social events and phenomena are enabled with clear views on its research, will lead to an increase in relevant studies, and thus, people will grasp its importance for social sciences. Grounded theory approach has come into widespread use in health sciences and this study holds out much hope of using grounded theory more and more, in the field of social sciences.

After all, this study involves three basic frameworks: first, investigating the place of grounded theory in the social sciences thoroughly, second, being consulted as a guide scrutinizing the function of implementation process of grounded theory approach in full detail and third, the further expansion of the implementation frequency of grounded theory approach in the social sciences.

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