

HOW TO DEVELOP A FRAMEWORK MANUALLY FROM QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW DATA

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Abstract. Framework development in qualitative research is the systematic categorisation and interpretation of information or data to construct a conceptual structure which can be presented to explain relationships between emerging themes. However, the prevailing trend to use advanced software tools to analyse qualitative data poses several challenges for many researchers, especially those who consider those tools nonintuitive, resource-consuming, or not well-suited for their specific depth of inquiry. The objective of this review is to outline a structured, manual process for developing a conceptual framework grounded in interview data, highlighting each analytical stage from data familiarisation to thematic synthesis and framework construction. This review is a narrative review that discusses the processes involved in manually constructing a conceptual framework using the interview data in qualitative research. In qualitative research, especially in research where interviews are methods for data collection, the formation of a conceptual framework is a systematic process of inquiry that is rooted in the experiences of the participants and reflects the aggregated data. The process typically unfolds in four sequential but iterative steps: (a) data familiarisation; (b) initial coding and categorisation; (c) theme development; and (d) framework construction. In conclusion, the manual process of constructing conceptual frameworks from qualitative interview data is a methodically rigorous, context-dependent way of ensuring that the researcher remains deeply connected with their data whilst also generating organised and meaningful knowledge. For future research, researchers may wish to consider an in-depth comparison of manual and software-assisted frame build-up to test the applicability of manual methods to different disciplines and cultural contexts.

Keywords: *conceptual framework, qualitative research, interview data, manual analysis, thematic synthesis*

Introduction

Framework development in qualitative research is the systematic categorisation and interpretation of information or data to construct a conceptual structure which can be presented to explain relationships between emerging themes. This process, however, is usually done manually, by such details and getting hands-on on the data to create some coherent and significant structure. It connects raw empirical observations with theoretical interpretation, providing a visual or conceptual image of important results. This is particularly helpful when conducting exploratory research when the research question is not well developed and instead aims at discovering new knowledge. The manual methods are very practical and make it easier to stay close to the context of one's data (Michelen et al., 2024). Based on the explanatory accounts of participants, the deductively derived framework offers a consistent and empirical description of the phenomenon under investigation, facilitating academic understanding and practical use. It also adds to the transparency and trustworthiness of qualitative findings by rendering the analytical logic visible. In addition, these approaches are used by scholars who are more interested in interpretive richness than in software wizardry, as indicated in recent evaluations of the rigour of qualitative research (Akmalia, 2024). This approach is intended to aid researchers and individuals with the inclination to describe the meaning

of data with a hands-on orientation, rather than needing to use abstract or arcane qualitative analysis software and tools.

However, the prevailing trend to use advanced software tools to analyse qualitative data poses several challenges for many researchers, especially those who consider those tools nonintuitive, resource-consuming, or not well-suited for their specific depth of inquiry (Kaufmann et al., 2020). Although these virtual tools can facilitate aspects of analysis, they are unlikely to replicate the immersive and interpretive nature of analysis that is a defining feature of qualitative inquiry (Edwards and Holland, 2020). This is particularly troubling when trying to build theoretical frames fostered through interview data, which is dependent upon a fine granular approach to participant accounts (Gerson and Damaske, 2020). Manual methods, using deep immersion, iterative coding, and interpretive insight, provide transparent and context-rich perspectives as an alternative. However, to the best of our knowledge, there are no principled instructions about how such frameworks can be built up systematically and without digital assistance. This is something our paper aims to address by looking at how a conceptual framework can be built up manually from qualitative interview data, doing this in a step-by-step way that maintains analytical integrity but is also accessible to researchers who want or need to work hands-on (Cheron et al., 2022).

The objective of this review is to outline a structured, manual process for developing a conceptual framework grounded in interview data, highlighting each analytical stage from data familiarisation to thematic synthesis and framework construction. This review is a narrative review that discusses the processes involved in manually constructing a conceptual framework using the interview data in qualitative research. A narrative review is ideally suited for integrating and interpreting different methodological perspectives, as it lacks the confines of the systematic review processes. It provides a flexible, narrative means of manually developing frameworks by moving iteratively back and forth between the data derived from interviews, including data familiarisation, the process of coding, identifying themes, and then mapping these into concepts (Gerson and Damaske, 2020). This approach is valuable for the present review by affording a nuanced and contextual analysis of qualitative analytical approaches, as the focus can be drawn on theoretical concepts and practical considerations (Kristiansen, 2022). In addition, it provides a consistent approach to the framework development process that is flexible for use with differing qualitative traditions and research situations (Jones, 2020). This article can therefore also act as a practical tool for qualitative researchers looking for a relatively simple but still rigorous way to develop frameworks without being dependent on more advanced software packages.

Review of past research

First, a manual conception of a framework from qualitative interview data is critical in achieving a strong and interpretive account of research findings, particularly in complex areas such as health and social care. This process commonly includes a variety of steps: methodological preparation, recruitment of participants, interview data collection, and meticulous and hand-coding analysis. Importantly, the rich, contextually grounded interpretation required for qualitative interviews must be conducted through systematic and thoughtful analysis. The Framework Analysis technique, which was developed by Ritchie and Spencer, has become well-established in UK qualitative health research, as it can accommodate large amounts of data that are manually structured without losing depth (Powell et al., 2021). Additionally, a benefit of this

process is that it permits the back-and-forth involvement with the data, allowing participants lived experiences to be thoroughly understood (Hernandez and Dringus, 2021). In this sense, the opportunity to convey detailed personal experiences by pinning them manually on a map offers a degree of subtlety which can hardly be achieved by a quantitative approach. So, having a structured (but flexible) analysis method, in particular, one that's conducive to manual manipulation of the data, is important to retain all the richness of the original data. Sibley et al. (2024) demonstrate this process in a multimethod study that created a framework for community rehabilitation, which helped to further demonstrate the transferability of manual techniques across policy and practice settings.

Subsequently, transcription accordingly forms a vital part of maintaining fidelity in the qualitative data. Transcripts of interviews should be made verbatim to preserve meaning, tone and idiom for manual analysis. Moreover, anonymisation shields the identity of the participant and therefore anything about them that might be sensitive; this helps to uphold ethical values in research (Tajuria et al., 2024). Post transcription, data are commonly analysed using open manual coding in which meaningful parts are taken from narratives, and thematic categories are constructed (Agel et al., 2021). At this point, there is a need for responsive 'manual' thematic analysis in which themes are constructed and taken down in light of patterns emerging from multiple interviews. The first manual codes serve as the foundation for higher-order conceptual aggregation, allowing for more profound insights into common themes. Hence, the precision of transcription and the rigour of the initial manual coding process are central to the development of a valid and reflexive framework. For ensuring analytical consistency and validity, researchers might use tools such as the TACT (trustworthiness, auditability, credibility and transferability) framework to evaluate rigour in qualitative studies (Daniel et al., 2024) or standardised assessment tools like the Copenhagen tool for the assessment of educational interventions in health research (Jensen et al., 2020). Secondly, awareness of quality and credibility cues, as suggested by Johnson et al. (2020), can aid researchers in assessing the stability of their manually developed frameworks.

In addition, cultural competence and contextual considerations are important when constructing a manual framework from interview data. The use of inclusive practices to design interview guides, especially among multicultural and underserved populations, for example, may improve construct validity and richness of data collected (Nguyen et al., 2021). Moreover, instruments such as COREQ (consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research) facilitate extensive reporting, thereby enhancing the transparency and trustworthiness of results (Whelan et al., 2024). Also as important is reliance on evidence from systematic literature reviews that inform the manual construction of evidence-based frameworks for addressing persistent service delivery issues. For instance, studies synthesising issues related to access to care or structural inequities will help shape the direction of framework development to ultimately point towards more actionable outcomes (Khalifa, 2023; Shaw et al., 2021). An example of this is that of Žalimienė and Junevičienė (2021), where the authors provided a classification of informal care recipients' needs for evidence-based social policy. As a manual, the development of a framework for employment interventions for Parkinson's disease (Munsell et al., 2024) demonstrates the utilisation of interview-based data in a health-based qualitative study. As a consequence, developers can develop frameworks manually that combine academic validity with real-world relevance. In summary,

embedding culturally sensitive and evidence-based perspectives increases the explanatory value and the real-world utility of the resulting framework.

Moreover, the integrity of the manual analysis process needs to be robustly maintained. Such methods as member checking are particularly useful to verify these interpretations with participants to make sure that the guided framework we developed manually represents their voices when identifying patient needs (Mirmoghtadaie et al., 2020). At the same time, leaving flexibility to data collection, like using video interviews, can also enhance access and participation among marginalised women, adding depth to the man-made framework (De Villiers et al., 2022). As a qualitative interpretation is always both an interpretation and interpretive, there is also a need to continually apply critical reflexivity towards the interpretation in a manual analysis of the designs. This reflexivity enhances analytic validity and contributes to the production of credible and relevant findings. In addition, triangulating sources of data and peer debriefing may enhance the dependability and confirmability of the study. In this effort, the use of modern frameworks such as the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) to direct manual interpretation has the potential to organise implementation information and new insights (Damschroder et al., 2020). Furthermore, to understand the sustainability of healthcare innovation, as is evidenced in the qualitative analysis reported in the study by Krelle et al. (2023), one noted the usefulness of the manually developed frameworks to guide long-term strategic planning.

In summary, forming a conceptual framework manually from qualitative interview data is multidimensional and iterative. It requires methodical planning, moral sensitivity, broad participation, and thorough manual attention. Frameworks such as the Framework Method and CFIR, among others, offer structured but flexible guidance to support the manual translation of complex qualitative data into succinct and actionable evidence. Importantly, an effective manual framework not only structures data but also extends the explanatory reach, such that the lived experiences of participants may be adequately captured. By doing so it also links empirical evidence with theoretical existence, and in this sense, it contributes to both research and practice. Finally, and essential to answering the important question of how rich interview data can most effectively be transformed into conceptual models to assist in understanding, decision-making, and policy development, the researchers in the current study devoted considerable effort to developing a rigorous and recursive manual process for framework development.

The role of interviews in qualitative research

In qualitative research, an interview is a data collection method of direct, personal (face-to-face) or mediated (telephone, video conference) interaction between a researcher and a respondent to elicit the respondent's experiences, perspectives, or understanding of a defined topic. More precisely, interviews may be classified into structured, semi-structured, or unstructured based on the extent of flexibility offered in the construction and ordering of questions (Elhami and Khoshnevisan, 2022). This approach is fundamentally dialogic, allowing researchers to follow up on responses, explain what is meant and elaborate on complexities. Unlike standardised survey instruments, interviews make it possible to have free and detailed responses, thus providing an in-depth and detailed knowledge of the topic (Brinkmann, 2022). Additionally, interviews are interactive and may establish rapport between the

researcher and subjects, thus leading to openness and sincerity of the responses (Chong, 2022). As a result, interviews are flexible instruments that are well-suited to the complexity of human behaviour and the social life of things.

Interviews, by their nature, are intrinsically interpretative and context-bound. They are not, in any true sense of the word, intended to pull facts out of people, they are intended to tease out what meaning people make of their own lives and experiences. Because of the interview context, participants are given the time to think and talk for themselves, and therefore this method can be highly qualified for studying subjective perceptions, social constructions and experiences (Bonar, 2023). This methodological orientation is consistent with the epistemological underpinnings of qualitative research, which values 'depth over breadth' and seeks to 'make sense' of phenomena from the perspective of the insider. In addition, qualitative interviews are flexible to the emergence of issues that might not have been tendered at the time of study design so that that sort of data enrichment (Roberts, 2020). Hence, this quality sets interviews apart from more structured methods of data collection and gives them the strength to capture meanings on the move in situ.

An interview is a key activity in qualitative inquiry because it can produce rich, detailed data that cannot always be found in other sources. They are by no means equivalent, especially since they also allow the scientist to delve into the reasons for belief or action, as well as the content of what is believed or done (Dursun, 2023). Interviews are particularly useful for investigating topics which people may be unwilling to discuss in a group setting or where sensitive, controversial or complex issues make group discussion difficult. Furthermore, because the procedure is interactive, researchers can dynamically adjust their questioning, which is advantageous in terms of data relevancy and depth. This flexibility means more subtle issues that can be missed by quantitative research can be investigated. Hence, interviews are regarded as “a key vehicle of entry to the subjective experiences, which constitute social realities and human behaviour” (Jones, 2020). Moreover, interviews can promote a sense of individual empowerment, providing interviewees with the opportunity to express their opinions as individuals in ways that can be limited using other methods. They promote methodological diversity as they can be used concerning different theoretical approaches, such as phenomenology, grounded theory and narrative analysis.

Interviewing is especially valuable in research that benefits from an in-depth exploration, such as when identity or culture, emotions, or personal decision-making are studied (Scheibelhofer, 2023). They are particularly suitable for small and medium-sized samples in which the goal is to investigate the diversity and richness of personal experiences without generalising statistically (Benlahcene and Ramdani, 2021). Interviews can also serve well in exploratory phases of research, theory building, and needs assessment where insufficient literature or models already exist. Additionally, they provide important knowledge to be used, for example in health, education, and organisational research, in which knowledge of human lived experiences and their perceptions is crucial for informing practice or policy (Indah, 2022). Thus, their capacity to uncover subtext and context effects can be of great use for both interventionists and policymakers in creating discriminatory policies (Mehmood et al., 2023). Indeed, interviews are crucial methodological tools for generating actionable knowledge amid complicated real-world dynamics.

The significance of framework derived from interview-based qualitative research

Firstly, models derived from qualitative interview data can act as useful models to structure complex, narrative data. Interviews often generate rich, detailed and unstructured data that capture the richness of the experiences, ideas and practices of the participants. Hence, a framework offers a systematic organisation of these insights, which facilitates the ability of researchers to abstract patterns, themes, and relations from diverse descriptions (Warmuth et al., 2021). In transforming raw data into an organised theoretical form, frameworks facilitate clearer communication of what is being found and increase the accessibility of the qualitative analysis. As such, they are key to connecting deep stories of experience with more abstract analytical claims (Langley and Meziani, 2020). Theories are also developed inductively through the observation of relationships among identified concepts, while a framework can help to develop theories by linking concepts. Such frameworks in education and other organisations could inform policy and practice by providing empirically based guidance on the experiences of stakeholders. Additionally, well-delineated frameworks strengthen the trustworthiness and transferability of qualitative results and thus remain a significant resource for scholars and practitioners (Goldsmith, 2021). In providing this, frameworks enable cohesion within reports and maintain the research narrative in empirical reference.

Further, a framework adds explanatory power to qualitative research by describing the dynamic relationships among significant themes derived from the data. Instead of reporting discrete findings, the model permits the demonstration of how concepts interact and relate to each other in a given setting (Snodgrass et al., 2020). This is particularly useful in research where we are interested in understanding dynamic and multidimensional processes, experiences, or systems. Then, a holistic view is sought, and new literature or theories are generated based on the observation of evidence (Tong and Tan, 2022). Thus, it reinforces the role of qualitative research in theorising in a field. In addition, these frameworks may act as scaffolds for comparatives or longitudinal comparisons, promoting a sustained academic dialogue (Mishra and Dey, 2022). Well-formulated summaries, at their best, do more than present findings but raise profound questions in the research loop.

Furthermore, models have applied uses to inform decision-making in real-world settings. In areas like education, health care, organisational practice or community-based development, frameworks drawn from interview data can then inform intervention, policy, or service enhancement (Jack et al., 2023). As these schemas originate from participants' firsthand lived experiences, they tend to comprise context-dependent anxieties and are thus very accessible for use in applied CBT. They provided insight into realities for affected communities and therefore helped to ensure solutions were responsive and inclusive (Canfell et al., 2022). As a result, such frameworks have real-world utility beyond the ivory tower, affecting real-life practice and policy. Their saliency can also increase stakeholders' involvement in the research outputs, promoting more impact and adoption (Mathieson et al., 2024). When applied to practice, these models may be used to facilitate the adoption and implementation of evidence-based practices. They also anchor an adaptable platform for scaling interventions as stakeholder needs and contextual conditions change throughout time.

In overall, developing a framework from the interview data, as we have done, promotes methodological rigour and transparency in qualitative research. It involves a step-by-step process from data gathering to analysis and conceptualisation to intensify this study's credibility and trustworthiness (Patterson et al., 2022). Presenting the

findings within a framework, in particular, enables other scholars to follow the analysis that drives the research and to use the pattern in replication, critique, or new development (Steltenpohl et al., 2023). Additionally, if reported in publications, an extensively elaborated framework serves as a touchstone for future research, facilitating comparison and/or meta-synthesis. In addition, frameworks serve to distil not just the wisdom from a single study but that of a cumulative body of knowledge in a field. Moreover, due to their clarity and visual nature, they are well suited to academic communication and teaching purposes (Faff and Kernbach, 2021). In an age of growing qualitative research across disciplines, the explicit statement of analytic logic via frameworks enhances the interpretative force and the usefulness of the research results.

Steps for developing a framework from interview data

In qualitative research, especially in research where interviews are methods for data collection, the formation of a conceptual framework is a systematic process of inquiry that is rooted in the experiences of the participants and reflects the aggregated data. Whereas quantitative methods frequently test prior hypotheses, qualitative inquiry permits patterns and meanings to be drawn inductively from the data. From the interview transcripts, an empirically based framework developed manually can help the researcher process complex storylines and reveal connections between core concepts. This perspective is particularly appealing in exploratory work, the objective of which is to generate understanding, rather than to replicate or confirm hypotheses. The process typically unfolds in four sequential but iterative steps: (a) data familiarisation; (b) initial coding and categorisation; (c) theme development; and (d) framework construction.

Data familiarisation

Jobs are worked as data are gathered, and the researcher is getting into the interview data. This process involves listening to audio recordings and reading verbatim transcripts according to the principles of each participant's meaning. The researcher summarises recurrent thoughts, affect, and contexts with specific attention to details of language, tone of voice, and pauses suggesting meaning not expressed. This is essential because interview data are often rich and multifaceted personal experiences that are not always retrieved through reading on the surface. Immersion enables the researcher to be engrossed in the data and is critical in the process of discovering codes and themes that are informative (Saunders et al., 2023). The goal is to get to know the data 'on a deep level', and to become sensitive to subtle nuances and striking insights contained in the stories. Through this engagement, the early stages of coding take shape and pave the way to coding consistently.

Initial coding and categorisation

After becoming fully immersed in the interview transcripts, the researcher begins open coding by hand. This entails systematically selecting words, phrases or sentences that correspond either directly to the research purposes or disclose significant participant perspectives. Codes can be thought of as labels applied to segments of meaningful data, which could be related to feelings, behaviours, opinions or events. The researcher then reviews the coded text to uncover similarities or patterns and to aggregate related codes into broader categories. For example, several codes on problems at work could be grouped under a heading such as "Workplace Problems". This

classification serves to organise and break down the data into digestible chunks and allows for systematic comparison within and between participant responses (Campbell et al., 2021). It also provides a 'transition stage' between raw data and higher-level thematic analyses, ensuring that the 'richness of the interviews is not lost while initial familiarising of the data begins'.

Theme development

Drawing out from the categories, the subsequent procedure is to construct superordinate themes which thread through the central meanings generated by the data. Themes bring together several categories into consistent ideas concerning the primary research questions. For instance, headings like “Workplace Challenges”, “Management Support”, and “Career Growth” can be subsumed under a larger category, such as “Career Experience”. This thematic progression invites interpretative analyses, where the researcher goes beyond describing categories to identify relationships, contrasts, and commonalities across the interviews (Xu and Zammit, 2020). Among other things, the themes serve as conceptual way-stations that reduce data into convenient, usable conclusions. They recognise the diversity of peoples’ experiences and also the collective voice of the participants. Creating clear themes is essential for forming a valid framework which reflects the phenomenon observed.

Framework construction

The last stage is the aggregation of these topics as having been organised in a matrix that displays, visually or conceptually and proportioned, connections and dynamics among the data. This structure serves as a map that shows how the various topics are related to each other according to the research problem. For instance, the framework could express that “Management Support” positively affects “Employee Experience”, which in turn affects “Career Growth”. By developing this blueprint, the investigator can provide a cohesive context that intertwines various aspects of the experience of the participants (Gregory, 2020). It also provides a useful way for communicating findings in a focused way to academic and practitioner audiences to help to develop theory or inform policy and practice. By building the model from the ground up, anchored in detailed qualitative data, the researcher constructs something true to participants’ voices, yet analytically clear.

Consideration for expert validation in postgraduate framework development

In qualitative studies, in particular those incorporated as constituents of postgraduate theses, justification for expert validation of the developed tool (or the decision not to perform it) relates closely to research aims, fitting with the context and decisions on pragmatic issues. Although expert validation is a well-known technique to further improve the credibility and generalisability of research frameworks, it is not always possible or mandatory for postgraduate work. The decision to seek or not seek expert confirmation should be based on the research question, the size of the study and the available resources. This section presents the principal reasons for not including expert validation, together with scenarios in which inclusion may be necessary or beneficial. Reflection upon these considerations ensures the research upholds methodological integrity while also acknowledging the real-world limitations of postgraduate research.

The following discussion is divided into (a) justifications for omitting expert validation; and (b) exceptions that may require it.

Justification for omitting expert validation

In the first place, it is the case that many postgraduate qualitative studies are exploratory with a focus on conceptual development from empirical work, rather than hypothesis testing of a priori theoretical concepts. Central to such practices, the frameworks that are produced this way tend to be heuristic, constructed to reflect developing trends and participant perspectives. In turn, expert validation at this early stage is premature given that the framework serves principally as a springboard for future research, rather than a theory that demands immediate endorsement. Greater emphasis on the true reflection of participants' voices should be the priority, and 'expert' views might unintentionally take precedence over participants' experiences of the relevant conditions. As noted by Hosseini and Haukås (2025), prioritising the voice of the participant and upholding researcher reflexivity is paramount in ethical, exploratory framing, especially in early development. Additionally, exploratory frameworks are best if allowed to be flexible and open for further refinement at a later stage of the studies, a circumstance which might be limited when expert validation is applied to the framework at these early stages in the process and leads to premature closure. As a result, not validating against expert opinion conserves the inherent nature of the evolving framework in the early design stages.

Second, postgraduate students typically have tight time frames and limited resources, which may render the approach of consulting experts for validation infeasible. Organising expert feedback, however, is not without its efforts, as it often goes beyond the means of a thesis task in volume as well as duration. In these instances, researchers could maintain methodological rigour via other means, such as transparent data analysis, member checking or respondent validation, for example. These methods enable interpretations to be verified directly with participants at no additional cost or expert interpretation panels. Participatory member checking provides a feasible and economical approach to co-generate findings while balancing the time and budget constraints of qualitative research (Kullman and Chudyk, 2025). Additionally, expert consultation can be costly and contractual, which is often impractical given the PhD's budgetary constraints. So what's needed is a happy medium, a situation where research quality is maintained but we don't go beyond our resources.

Third, qualitative research paradigms provide a participant-orientated emphasis on validity, privileging insider views and lived experience as being the core of what is found. The validity of a framework is rooted in in-depth, detailed and more context-relevant coding, clustering and theme building. This type of stance supports epistemologies which value data-driven credibility over that imposed through outside expert adjudications. The researcher maintains the authenticity and contextuality of the research by simply listening to the meanings and understandings of participants. As enunciated by Kenny and colleagues, inclusive qualitative approaches that are grounded in participant voice are particularly important when conducting research across under-represented or disenfranchised populations (Kenny et al., 2023). Thus, the model mimics the heterogeneity and ambiguity observed in life that would be smoothed out by external validation. This is especially important when conducting research that seeks to give voice to marginalised or unheard groups.

Finally, postgraduate theses, likewise, are typically intended as input to theory development, not theory testing or confirmation. For this reason, the frameworks created are preliminary models designed to help drive research. Expert validation is rare unless the further phases of the research include testing it empirically or refining the model – which often goes beyond the scope of a postgraduate project. Early-stage structures Ready-made frames for these kinds of comparatively late-stage structures are best left open to criticism and further development, which corresponds to the formative and explorative character of postgraduate research. As Garvey and Jones (2021) clarify, in qualitative research theoretical frameworks act as some guide for the development of concepts, not as a straightjacket for verification, particularly in the context of studies that are orientated for inductive, data-driven enlightenment. Also, these often need a narrow focus, with emphasis on novelty rather than full validation. Hence, excluding expert validation is in line with the common goals and operational constraints of postgraduate studies.

Exceptions requiring expert validation

Although there are good reasons for not using expert validation in most postgraduate research, there are exceptions where expert participation may be required or very useful. For highly technical or specialised domains like healthcare, law and engineering, domain experts are involved to ensure that the framework's concepts and interpretations are accurate, relevant, and can be operationalised. As Im et al. (2023) describe, expert involvement in qualitative research related to health strengthens the validity and credibility of findings, particularly when findings influence clinical practice or policy. Expert advice minimises interpretational imprecision and authorises the framework in expert domains. These are of particular relevance for frameworks that are supposed to support decisions with significant consequences, professional standards, or regulatory needs. It is also expected that feedback from experts will enhance the clarity, precision, and utility of the framework. In these situations, expert validation is essential for academic credibility and practical applicability.

In addition, where research is undertaken in collaboration with government bodies, industry or professional bodies, expert validation may be necessary to satisfy organisational criteria or legislative requirements. Frameworks that are created to achieve these goals are frequently employed in policy-making, strategy-setting, or meeting compliance demands. In this context, formal validation from well-established experts is required to ensure that these approaches are appropriate in their application and have been accepted by the relevant parties. As Saied et al. highlights, expert validation constitutes, in many systematic research methodologies employed in a variety of institutional and regulatory settings, a crucial step in assuring application and compliance with established standards (Saied et al., 2023). Expert validation in such environments also adds transparency, accountability and legitimacy to the research. So, for models designed to have effects on institutions or policies, expert review is usually appropriate as a part of the research process.

Expert validation is also helpful when a framework is developed for immediate future applications, for example, to inform organisational practices, intervention designs, or programme developments. Expert or end-user input can also help to highlight gaps and would help to shape and improve the content and usefulness of the framework. Practical experience enables anticipating implementation difficulties and further enhances its applicability. Van Haastrecht et al. (2023) found that expert

interviews aided the construction of the VAST validation (a validation framework for e-assessment solutions) framework by making it more comprehensive, more usable and more aligned with stakeholders' needs for practical e-assessment systems. Additionally, by engaging professionals in the validation, we are more likely to gain people's endorsement and to ensure more frictionless integration of our framework. In both cases, expert validation plays the role of the methodological and tactical.

Lastly, expert validation has the potential to increase the reliability and applicability of research results when the framework is meant to be used other than for the thesis. When applying the framework to projects that are subjected to third-party support, competitions or such that will work on colliding different intellectual traditions, a strong endorsement of experts is particularly useful to strengthen the framework and its generalisability. Funding organisations or academic publishers may demand this sort of validation as a quality control process. As Salzano et al. (2023) note, these validation procedures add to the interpretive power, credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research, especially when research is intended to influence larger academic or institutional readerships. Involving experts here could raise the profile and significance of the research, lead to funding or publication opportunities, and signal to wider audiences the utility of the framework. And when that research gets beyond the academy, expert endorsement can bring an important level of credibility and power.

This process of building a framework based on interview data in postgraduate research is disciplined and systematic, guaranteeing relevance and utility. To start, data are intentionally collected at a qualitative level through interviews, frequently using think-aloud or semistructured data collection methods, to capture rich participant-driven contexts. Kowalski et al. (2024) note such approaches support the consolidation of deep framework knowledge with experiential learning, particularly in postgraduate physiotherapy students, revealing the importance of clinical reasoning in competency development. This first phase of data collection establishes a strong foundation for the future development of the framework by uncovering nuanced perspectives necessary for contextual applicability. In addition, the experiential narratives and reflections of the participants recorded during interviews provide an important source of input for the identification of core themes. Indeed, a rich and varied data set helps to maintain a thread linking the emerging framework to the students' and teachers' real worlds.

Post-data collection, a rigorous qualitative analysis is vital, with thematic analysis often the method of choice. In this phase, we now engage in coding the data, patterning and further theme development to build a coherent story within the aforementioned academic and pragmatic restraints. This is illustrated by Matahela and Makhanya (2024) in their framework introduction of thematic reasoning for nursing education in the South African context; in their framework approach, policy considerations and implementation challenges are used to shape the thematic synthesis. By respecting participant voices at every step of this process, the analysis governs the content of the framework and ensures that it is premised on the actual experiences and institutional settings of participants. Iterative theme refinement is also conducive to good analytical clarity and conceptual rigour. This level of breakdown guarantees the eventual framework reflects the current trends of education and practice.

After drafting the first version of the framework, expert validation is very essential for the framework to be credible, applicable, and accepted. The involvement of experts through co-design methods in the framework development promotes partnership and enhances the relevance of the framework to postgraduate education. Theobald et al.

(2023) consider the contribution of stakeholder collaboration to co-constructive nursing education framework adoption, noting the relevance of collaborative reality-altering. Iterative revisions are also a common result of expert feedback, as Kidd et al. (2022) in their development of an implicit bias training framework, where expert input is seen to fine-tune the focus of (and responsiveness to) the specific educational needs of the framework. Additionally, expert validation helps to anchor the framework with academic rigour and practice standards. The methodology also inspires continued interaction between researchers and practitioners to ensure that the framework is both cutting-edge and practically viable.

To enhance the integrity of the framework, triangulation with existing models and theories is suggested. Reference to competency frameworks such as CanMEDS provides a validated scaffolding against which new material can be assessed (Pritchard et al., 2022). Persano Adorno and Giaconia (2025) also emphasise the importance of theoretical background in the construction of structured environments for education that facilitates efficient pedagogy. Furthermore, there is the need for frameworks to be consistent with the current policies for education and professional standards, as pointed out by Recha and Mulalu (2023), which should promote adherence to international regulations as well as being responsive to societal and industry needs, a situation that is paramount in health professions education (James et al., 2020). It also promotes theory and policy integration, consistency and comparability across programmes. This coherence results in a more systematic approach to the development and assessment of competencies in postgraduate training.

Applying the framework in schools calls for special attention and consideration of curricular development and teaching and assessment methods. The co-design methodology which Theobald et al. (2021) mentioned for discussion. Propose pragmatic matrices that provide a fine balance between academic rigour and industry applicability that would improve graduate employability and curriculum responsiveness. Ongoing evaluation of integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches as suggested by Wang et al. (2021) enables continuing quality oversight and cycles of improvement. In addition, care needs to be taken to include cultural and contextual diversity, with Li et al. (2023) arguing for the necessity of integrating social practices and cultural relevance into the development of equitable and effective postgraduate attributes specific to diverse institutional contexts. Provisions for feedback collection and adaptivity of the curriculum should be components of the implementation process as well. These actions help ensure the framework is dynamic, and driven by stakeholder needs and sectoral developments.

Lastly, ethical reflection, strategic communication and stakeholder engagement are key at all stages of developing and implementing the framework. Ethical principles especially in supervision and decision-making, are the cornerstones of responsible educational practice (Özyiğit, 2022). In particular, examiners can confirm the suitability of research frameworks during undergraduate and postgraduate viva voce thesis examinations, which provides a low-cost but efficient method of examining the quality, rigour, and validity of frameworks (Tumiran, 2024). This extra check can potentially improve the framework's credibility without the need for additional validation. Dissemination also builds stakeholder buy-in as a means to build trust and engage in collaboration to facilitate integration (Arar et al., 2025). In the end, the qualitative data synthesis, expert stamp, ethical loading, and strategic communication by evidence make for a dynamic and contemporary framework that is a step forward for

postgraduate education. Further studies should also investigate the portability of these frameworks in other settings to facilitate the process of continuous improvement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the manual process of constructing conceptual frameworks from qualitative interview data is a methodically rigorous, context-dependent way of ensuring that the researcher remains deeply connected with their data whilst also generating organised and meaningful knowledge. By moving through iterative stages, from familiarisation and manual coding to thematic synthesis and framework development, researchers can produce frameworks that are analytically rigorous while remaining close to lived experience. This method promotes not only methodological transparency and interpretative richness; it also provides a way to integrate multiple qualitative traditions methodologically, without resorting to complex analytical software. Such a manual framework development can be a great asset for the type of exploratory research where flexibility, being open to participants and being responsive to their stories are important. It also allows scholars to maintain control of the analytic process, encouraging creativity and reflexivity in theory generation. For future research, researchers may wish to consider an in-depth comparison of manual and software-assisted frame build-up to test the applicability of manual methods to different disciplines and cultural contexts. They may also explore creative validation strategies, such as participant feedback and peer debriefing, to enhance trustworthiness and support practical application. Such efforts will enhance the emergent conversation of qualitative rigour and contribute to the development of contextually embedded robust theoretical models.

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Conflict of interest

The author confirms that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research study.

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