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Proposing the "MIRACLE" Narrative Framework for Providing Thick Description in Qualitative Research

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Abstract

Thick description of qualitative findings is critical to improving the transferability of qualitative research findings as it allows researchers to assess their applicability to other contexts and settings. However, what thick description entails and how it should be carried out is often missing or insufficiently described. While expert qualitative researchers may be familiar with the concept, the wide variety of meanings and interpretations of thick description in the literature may make it difficult for novice qualitative researchers to understand this concept when reporting qualitative findings. The purpose of this paper is to propose the "MIRACLE" narrative framework for providing thick description in qualitative research. We developed this framework based on a critical review of theoretical literature about thick description and writing in qualitative research, as well as our personal experiences conducting, writing, and publishing qualitative studies. The proposed framework can be valuable for improving the reporting quality and transferability of qualitative research findings.

Keywords

methods in qualitative inquiry, case study, ethnography, interpretive description, narrative

Introduction

Thick description is a critical strategy for improving the transferability and analytical generalization (i.e., generalization of findings to a broader knowledge base or theory) of qualitative research findings, as it allows researchers to assess the applicability of those findings to other contexts (Firestone, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thick description refers to giving a thorough account of the participants' views, intents, circumstances, motives, meanings, and understandings. However, as individuals do not exist in isolation, thick description also requires accurately describing the context of the observations, including the psychological, institutional, sociological, and anthropological dimensions of the phenomenon being studied (Jorgensen, 2009). Additionally, since the findings of qualitative studies are (re-) constructions by the researchers from "what the participants construct at the time" (Wolff, 2003, p. 48), thick description requires researchers to provide a concise account of what unfolded in their minds as they interpret the findings.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted the absence of guidance for providing thick description, but no specific criteria have been established. Published writings on the topic are largely theoretical, or if they take a more practical approach, they briefly discuss the strategy (Brown & Coombe, 2015; Hyett et al., 2014; Younas et al., 2022). In qualitative research, what is required to provide an *appropriate* and

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adequate thick description is often missing and subject to varying interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ponterotto, 2006). For example, while Polit and Beck (2010) argue for providing thick description, when offering recommendations, they merely note that "decisions about degrees of ''thickness'' will depend on the particulars of the research, but a general recommendation is for researchers to consciously consider the consequences of their ''thickness'' decision for the applicability of their evidence" (p. 1456). The authors then vaguely elaborate that researchers should do a "better job at providing basic information about their participants, contexts, and timeframes" (p. 1456). Additionally, while the most frequently used qualitative research reporting checklists (O'Brien et al., 2014; Tong et al., 2007) require researchers to provide a thick description of their findings, they fail to offer a clear account of how it should be achieved. Similarly, qualitative methodologists advocate for thick descriptions of qualitative findings in textbooks, but they generally offer minimal explanations of what those entail. Empirical examples of thick descriptions in the literature are also scarce. In a review of strategies used in social work research to enhance the quality of qualitative research, Barusch et al. (2011) found that only 16% (n = 16) of the included articles used thick description and provided evidence of its use. The authors of this review noted that when authors employed this strategy, the reporting of the findings was significantly enhanced, allowing readers to evaluate its applicability in different contexts. Considering these issues, this paper offers a practical framework for researchers to generate and provide a thick description of the findings from qualitative studies. The seven components of the proposed framework are not relevant to all types of qualitative research and should be selected based on the research approach, purpose, and target audience of each particular qualitative study.

Theoretical Background

Various meanings of thick description are apparent in the literature. While this concept was initially discussed as an approach to writing and reporting ethnographies (Geertz, 1973; Kharel, 2015; Ponterotto, 2006; Ryle, 1971), in this paper, we argue that thick description is pertinent to all types of qualitative research. The concept of thick description spread beyond the specialized field of ethnography to other types of qualitative research after the publication of the trustworthiness criteria provided by Guba (1981), and, subsequently, by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These authors proposed four specific criteria for the naturalistic paradigm: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. They defined thick description as a strategy for ensuring the criterion of transferability by providing an account of the studied phenomena in adequate detail so that conclusions can be drawn to allow readers to make judgments about the fittingness of the findings with other contexts (i.e., the degree of similarity concerning settings, individuals, and situations). A few years later, Denzin (1989) discussed thick description in sociological research and stated that thick description "goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. It enacts what it describes" (p. 83). To further elaborate on the concept, Denzin outlined eleven thick description types: "micro, macro, historical, biographical, situational, relational, interactional, intrusive, incomplete, glossed, purely descriptive, and descriptive interpretive" (p. 91). He argued that a full thick description is biographical, historical, situational, relational, and interactional. However, other types of thick descriptions focus on relationships, individuals, and situations.

Thick description requires careful consideration of the research context (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2015; Ponterotto, 2006; Stake, 2010). Creswell and Miller (2000) associated thick description with contextualizing the individuals, settings, and situations under study by providing as much detail as possible concerning their interactions, experiences, feelings, and actions. Similarly, Ponterotto (2006) defined thick description as the researcher's responsibility to accurately describe and interpret observed social activities (or behaviors), including the thoughts and emotions of participants and their interactions within a particular context. He noted that, in this process, the researcher attributes intent and purpose to these actions based on his or her understanding of the context. Therefore, implementing reflexivity in interpreting the participants' experiences and accounting for the overt and covert effects of biases on interpretation becomes an essential task that can significantly enhance the provision of thick description (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Stake (2010) defined thick description by comparing it to rich description. The author noted that "description is rich if it provides abundant, interconnected details, and possibly cultural complexity, but it becomes thick description if it offers a direct connection to cultural theory and scientific knowledge" (p. 49). For example, suppose a researcher studying social suffering describes the meaning of this state from the participants' perspective within their personal and interpersonal lives and sociocultural context. In that case, this can be considered a detailed description. However, if the researcher also situates the participants' meaning of social suffering within their lives, local context, and broader sociocultural context and links the narrative to sociocultural theories (i.e., existing or participant-proposed) of social suffering, then it fits the description of a thick description.

Thick description has also often been presented in the literature as a means of improving the quality of qualitative research findings (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell and Miller (2000) stated that thick description is beneficial for promoting credibility and enhancing the interpretability of findings by adopting a constructivist lens for contextualizing participants and their settings. Ponterotto (2006) noted that thick description leads to thick interpretation and thick meaning of the findings for the researchers and

target audience. In this context, *thick* implies going beyond superficial description to reveal the depth of thinking and intent that may lie behind the actions of the participants (Jorgensen, 2009). Roller and Lavrakas (2015) argued that such a more in-depth description of research findings enables the consumers of research to recognize essential elements of the research and empowers them to assess if they would have achieved similar interpretations of the data as the researchers. In a similar vein, Ravitch and Carl (2019) highlighted that a thick description could make the context of the findings explicit, thereby enhancing the validity and generalizability of qualitative research. Amin et al. (2020) specified that thick description enables researchers to draw new theoretical insights about individuals and systems and generate relevant hypotheses and questions for further testing. For example, if a researcher provides an in-depth and thick description of social suffering in one context, researchers in other contexts can use this description to generate implications for practice and hypothesis testing in their contexts. A thin description, on the other hand, can jeopardize the successful use of findings to inform research and practice. More recently, Hays and McKibben (2021) have noted that thick description can potentially enhance naturalistic (i.e., the extent of transfer of findings to personal life experiences or tacit knowledge) and inferential generalizability (i.e., the extent to which the findings are considered relevant to different contexts or situations) of qualitative research findings.

Need for Practical Guidance

Thick description can vary across studies and qualitative methodologies and is contingent on the nature and type of research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). While thick description of context and sociocultural aspects is a critical consideration in ethnographies, this strategy is equally relevant to other types of qualitative designs (Hengst et al., 2015; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Literature reviews of qualitative studies demonstrated a lack of attention to thick description of methods and study findings. Sandelowski and Barroso (2002) reviewed 99 qualitative studies in nursing about women with HIV and found misrepresentation of data and analysis methods as study findings, misappropriation of quotes and theory, limited clarity about patterns and themes, and inadequate attention to methodological details, variations across samples, and study findings. Hyett et al. (2014) reviewed 12 qualitative case studies from health services, seven from the social sciences and anthropology, and 15 methodological case studies. They found that a considerable number of case studies provided very scant descriptions of the key methodological aspects and the context of the case and its holistic description. They noted that the context of the cases was poorly described, thereby affecting the understanding of the case context.

O'Neil and Koekemoer (2016) reviewed 242 qualitative studies from the fields of psychology, organizational psychology, and human resources management. While they noted an increased acceptance of the use of qualitative research, they also raised issues about the methodological quality of the published studies, the limited use of advanced and specialized qualitative research designs, and the inadequate description of study methods, findings, and interpretations beyond the immediate phenomena of interest. Ospina et al. (2018) conducted a critical analysis of 129 qualitative studies in the field of public administration and reported variations in methodological reporting ranging from no description of methods to scant and detailed descriptions. Only 60% of the studies were rated to have reported detailed descriptions of contexts, situations, illustrations, and other forms of representation, along with themes, quotes, and findings. Al-Moghrabi et al. (2019) reviewed 100 qualitative studies in dental sciences and concluded that, despite using COREQ guidelines, in 51% of the studies the reporting quality was moderate, while in 34% it was poor. The common issues in reporting, as shown by the COREQ scores, were an inadequate description of the research team and reflexivity (34.8%), a limited description of study design and methods (53.9%), and analysis and findings (68.7%). Lastly, Walsh et al. (2020) reviewed 171 qualitative studies published across 71 nursing journals to assess the quality of reporting, also using the COREQ guidelines. The quality of reporting was rated as moderate (57%) or poor (38%).

Given these issues of inadequate or poor reporting and description in qualitative studies and insufficient guidance on how to provide thick description, an applied framework can be useful for both novice and seasoned qualitative researchers conducting any type of qualitative research. A framework of this type can enable researchers to present qualitative studies in as much detail as possible. Lastly, an applied framework can be valuable as a teaching tool for guiding students in the writing and reporting of qualitative studies.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to propose the "MIRACLE" narrative framework for providing thick description in qualitative research in the health, social, and behavioral sciences and to illustrate its use in practice by providing exemplars of published qualitative studies. We offer this framework as a tool for researchers to understand the different ways to ensure the *thickness* of qualitative research findings and methods.

Method

We completed a critical review of methodological literature to identify peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and general research texts about thick description in qualitative studies, the quality of reporting in qualitative studies, and guidance on writing qualitative research. A critical review is a reflective account of the literature on a particular topic that aims to highlight the limitations of the literature and generate a comprehensive theoretical understanding of the topic

(Paré & Kitsiou, 2017). Such reviews enable analyzing the most relevant literature in terms of its theoretical and conceptual contribution to understanding a given phenomenon. This type of literature review results in the creation of theories, frameworks, or conceptual models, as opposed to merely a summary of the literature (Grant & Booth, 2009).

We performed the literature search within multiple databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Ovid, and Google Scholar using general keywords, free text search terms, MESH terms, and subject headings such as "qualitative research", "qualitative research methods", "qualitative research writing", "thick description", "rich description", and "research methods". Since this search was not systematic, as done in systematic and scoping reviews, the PRISMA reporting guidelines were not followed for reporting the search results.

We selected literature via purposive sampling based on our use and knowledge of qualitative research and our judgment about the thick description of methods, methodology, and study findings presented in the papers. The framework was developed based on critical reading of the literature, our experiences conducting and publishing qualitative research, and workshops and educational sessions on the effective use and writing of qualitative research. During this selection, practical examples of published qualitative studies were identified to illustrate the described framework. The selected literature was synthesized in a narrative, conceptual, and logical manner to develop the framework. The definitions and explanations of thick description from the selected literature were reviewed and interpreted to generate essential features of thick description. The provided explanations were coded for the words used in the MIRACLE acronym and other words with similar meanings and compiled into the framework and its descriptors. These essential features from the definitions, the compiled codes, and the descriptors were converted into the components of the framework. Drawing from the extant literature, we proposed our definitions and guiding questions for each component of the framework.

"MIRACLE" Narrative for Thick Description

We offer a practical acronym to provide thick description in qualitative studies. The acronym MIRACLE stands for meaningful, interpretative, relational, authentic, contextualized, linked, and emic narratives. Each of these components is discussed in the sections that follow.

Meaningful Narrative

Drawing from several authors' conceptualization of thick description (Ponterotto, 2006; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Schwandt, 2007), we define a meaningful narrative as an account of qualitative findings with which readers and other stakeholders can better resonate with participants' experiences based on their understandings, tacit and learned knowledge, and current experiences with the investigated phenomena. A meaningful narrative gives voice to individuals' perspectives on the specific actions they perform or situations they encounter, thereby enriching the findings and increasing the likelihood of being utilized by readers and other stakeholders (Ponterotto, 2006; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). For example, if a meaningful narrative is included in a qualitative report for healthcare professionals who care for individuals with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, then professionals may find the description of the patients' experiences close to their clinical encounters with such individuals.

This type of narrative needs to include words, phrases, statements, and exclamation marks that allow researchers to capture and provide a more accurate representation of the understandings, emotions, and feelings of the study participants in a way that the narrative is meaningful to the readers, target audience, or stakeholders for whom it is written. Several strategies can be used for a more meaningful thick description, including using supporting quotes that are poignant and most illustrative of the research findings (Anderson, 2010), developing relevant and fully developed themes from the data (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016), selecting one or more themes and presenting findings as a story (Cristancho et al., 2021), and using participants words and phrases in the narrative describing the themes and sub-themes (Creswell & Báez, 2020; Wu et al., 2016).

Interpretative Narrative

In qualitative research, thick description entails more than merely providing extensive details of the participants and their settings. Schwandt (2007) claimed that the defining element of thick description is its interpretative nature rather than the details. He explained that "to thickly describe social action is actually to begin to interpret it by recording the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, and so on that characterize a particular episode" (p. 296). Ponterotto (2006) further emphasized that thick description involves interpreting and explaining the meanings, behaviors, and actions of research participants. Therefore, thick description should be interpretative. We define an interpretative narrative as one that enables readers to differentiate the viewpoints and experiences of the study participants from the elucidations of their experiences, while simultaneously offering an integrated account of the examined topic. Put simply, the interpretative narrative is evident when the reader can distinguish between what the participants stated and how the researchers interpreted their statements.

An interpretative narrative is essential for illuminating the underlying meanings, intents, and motives of participants' words and phrases by situating them in sociocultural settings (Stenius et al., 2017; Younas et al., 2022). To do so, researchers may take "disparate pieces of information and interpret a new complex whole through integration" (Mitchell & Clark, 2021,

p.4). Sandelowski (1998) raised the concern that a prevalent problem in qualitative research writing is the narration of participants' stories without converting them into an interpretative account, requiring less summarization and a cruder description of what participants said. Sandelowski (1998) further argued that ""Heaped data" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 13) are not equal to thick description, are not likely to lead readers to the point of an article, and indicate that the writer is still unclear about what the point is" (p. 376). Therefore, a thick description is achieved when there is a balanced account of participants' views and the researcher's interpretation of those views in connection to the study's context, situations, history, and knowledge (Creswell & Báez, 2020; Sandelowski, 1998; Stenius et al., 2017). In addition, researchers can assess the consistency and validity of their interpretations of participants' data and generated themes through discussions with them (Polit & Beck, 2017). When an interpretive account provides a credible explanation of contexts and participant experiences, it enables researchers to assess the utility of such an account and then convert the underlying interpretations into their contexts.

Relational Narrative

We define the relational narrative as one that reports qualitative findings and data in relation to the environment, social and cultural situations, and other individuals influencing the accounts and experiences of the participants. Denzin (1989) described relational thick description as something that "brings relationships alive" (p. 94) by making explicit the interactional experience of research participants (Denzin, 1989; Ponterotto, 2006). A relational narrative should offer a vivid account of participants' experiences, feelings, and emotions in relation to their living world and environments. The relationship between sociocultural norms and practices should be examined in the context of participants' everyday lives, considering the time frame, since participants' experiences and perceptions evolve with time (Stenius et al., 2017).

A chronological approach can enable researchers to offer a contextualized narrative by describing their research and findings from fieldwork initiation to study conclusion. This approach involves describing the initial steps to entry and the process of building relationships with the participants, as well as learning about their experiences, analyzing data, and demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of the topic in relation to a series of steps, cultural and social worlds, and individuals (Weaver-Hightower, 2018). While writing a relational narrative, researchers need to ensure that stereotypical, racial, sexist, and derogatory connections among participants and their cultures and societies are avoided. For instance, if a researcher is writing about Arab or South Asian people from Muslim countries who live in Western countries, a common stereotype may be that everyone who lives in Muslim countries is a Muslim. Similarly, when describing the racism Muslims face in Western countries, researchers may link this notion to the false belief that Islam is a violent religion or that Muslims are terrorists. A relational narrative can also be presented by describing specific themes and sub-themes across diverse participants in terms of age, gender, and ethnic orientation (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). For example, the reactions and feelings of women and men towards childcare could be described from a social and cultural standpoint by segregating their responses according to the themes identified in the data.

Authentic Narrative

We define the authentic narrative as one that supports the description of study findings in a manner that appears genuine and representative of the participants' experiences and viewpoints. Thick description entails giving voice to the experiences, words, phrases, perspectives, actions, motivations, and intentions of the participants (Denzin, 1989; Ponterotto, 2006). Therefore, their viewpoint must be presented so that the empowerment and authority of participants' experiences are reflective of their described accounts (Sandelowski, 1998; Stenius et al., 2017). There are two primary ways of offering an authentic narrative. First, researchers can select and use the most accurate quotes, phrases, and words provided by participants. Authentic quotes are those that provide a direct account of the experiences and perspectives of the participants regarding the prevalent patterns and themes that explain the studied phenomenon (Cristancho et al., 2021; Lingard, 2019). In qualitative research, there are several types of quotes, such as in-line quotes (i.e., placing participants' words or phrases within an author's interpretation) and block quotes (i.e., placing participants' words or quotes anywhere from a paragraph to a lengthy interview extract (Gopaldas, 2016)). While both types of quotes may be employed for an authentic narrative, in-line quotes may be more effective. When selecting a quote for reporting the authentic narrative, researchers must consider two questions: a) "Is the quote illustrative?" and b) "Is the quote representative?" (Cristancho et al., 2021, p. 114–116). Second, when reporting findings, researchers need to use words and phrases from the participants to construct interpretations. For instance, if the research participants are non-native speakers, the narrative can include words and phrases in their native language (Younas et al., 2022). This is an effective strategy for empowering participants and providing them a voice, particularly when the sample comprises underserved and minority groups (e.g., indigenous populations, cultural tribes). This strategy also enables readers who are bilingual in English and their native language to assess the congruence between the interpreted narratives and the participants' genuine accounts of their experiences.

Contextualized Narrative

We define the contextualized narrative as one retaining adequate and in-depth details of the context, situation, and setting

when describing qualitative methods and findings. It entails creating a contextually mediated and grounded narrative of the participants' experiences. The context may be a family, a work environment, a community, or the general culture (Ponterotto, 2006). As noted by Denzin (1989), "thick description records interpretations that occur within the experience as it is lived" (p. 98). A contextualized narrative to enhance thick description entails offering adequate details about the study participants, their communities, settings, ethnicities, cultural orientations, situations, and timeframes (Polit & Beck, 2010; Gopaldas, 2016).

To contextualize a narrative, it is essential to define and describe the social and cultural setting and the role of the setting in drawing interpretations from the words and phrases of individuals. Also, to be considered is the impact of the context on the data interpretation by researchers (Stenius et al., 2017). Using artifacts (e.g., pictures of tools) such as data from field notes and observations regarding cultural practices and norms, micro and macro-level community systems, and participants' behaviors and practices is a potential way to contextualize the narrative. For example, researchers can present pictures taken within the field to demonstrate and explain some aspects of the studied phenomena. Another approach is framing conclusions, describing inferences concerning research participants, their setting, and their situation, and avoiding hasty generalizations (Weaver-Hightower, 2018). The quotes presented in the narrative can be contextualized by using pseudonyms and clearly noting the participants' age, gender, race, sexual orientation, and any other relevant demographic information (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). To achieve an accurate contextualization of the qualitative findings and develop a contextualized narrative, at least one researcher involved in data collection must also be involved (and play a prominent role) in the analysis and reporting of the qualitative data. Researchers conducting fieldwork may have memories or implicit understandings; Hammersley (2010) refers to these as "head-notes" that are not captured in audio recordings or field notes but are crucial for interpreting and reporting the findings.

Linked Narrative

We define the linked narrative as an account of participants' data and researchers' interpretations of data interconnected to the social and cultural context, but also consistent with the research question and methods employed to study the phenomenon. Stenius et al. (2017) emphasized that for a thorough description of qualitative findings, data and interpretations should be linked to the research question, field notes, and other documentation, making it more straightforward for readers to understand how the methods and findings are interconnected. Sandelowski (1998) added that when writing qualitative findings, one must ensure that the writing is consistent with the research objectives and methods. The linked narrative enables readers to evaluate the narrative and situate it within a broader sociocultural context and knowledge of the phenomenon.

A linked narrative can be developed in several ways. First, ensuring that clear justification is provided for specific methods and data, how the methods enabled the collection of rich data, and how the accounts of participants were influenced by their social and cultural beliefs. Second, the use of theoretical frameworks and sociocultural theories is effective for relating study results to broader context and knowledge. Using typologies of human behaviors, for instance, when reporting a qualitative study on behavioral phenomena, can describe how research participants behave in specific situations in comparison to a theoretically accepted way of acting in those situations (Cristancho et al., 2021; Sandelowski, 1998). When reporting findings, the use of visuals such as frameworks, thematic maps, and infographics can facilitate the development of a linked narrative connecting themes, subthemes, participant groups, and theoretical concepts informing the research (Cristancho et al., 2021). In qualitative findings, well-developed figures and maps provide a visual representation of essential concepts and their relationships (Gopaldas, 2016). Lastly, when multiple quotes are used to support the findings, establishing the relationship between the quotes and the findings can result in a linked narrative (Lingard, 2019).

Emic Narrative

We define the emic narrative as one that focuses on a person-centered approach to describing the experiences, viewpoints, mannerisms, gestures, and ways of interaction of participants. In this type of narrative, a greater emphasis is placed on making the semantic and apparent meaning of participants' experiences visible to the readers. While the emic and authentic narratives are interconnected to some extent, the emic narrative captures the participants' culture, social community, and living world in relation to other participants, whereas the authentic narrative emphasizes the individual's experiences without elaborating on their relationships with others. The emic narrative is based on the notion that members of the same community can discuss the same topics in different ways at different times and places (Stenius et al., 2017), and that their experiences evolve in response to their sociocultural contexts. Therefore, when providing thick descriptions using an emic narrative, researchers should focus on describing the micro elements of the society and culture using the participants' own words and phrases. When providing a person-centered emic narrative, they should also avoid including lengthy interpretations of participants' data, words, and statements.

In order to present an emic narrative, researchers can provide within and cross-case analyses of the phenomenon under study using case studies and participant excerpts. To make the narrative person-centered, researchers can also use the participants' conclusions and shift the emphasis from their personal feelings to the emotions of the participants (Weaver-Hightower, 2018). When interpreting data and generating a

Table 1. Description and Exemplars of the MIRACLE Framework.

Component	Characteristics	Exemplar
Meaningful	• Captures the participants' accounts in a way that the emotions, feelings, and meanings are made apparent to the readers • Closer to readers' and stakeholders' personal experiences and tacit knowledge about the phenomena • Offers an opportunity for readers to better relate to participants' experiences, emotions, and feelings	Ligita et al. (2019) conducted a grounded theory study informed by constructivism and symbolic interactionism to explain how people with diabetes learn about their disease in Indonesia. They generated a substantive theory of *Learning, choosing, and acting: Self-management of diabetes in Indonesia* that entailed a very meaningful description of how participants received the information, processed it, responded to the recommendations, appraised the information, and then shared it with other people with diabetes. Throughout their narrative, the authors offered elaborative descriptions of the participants' views and clarified their interpretations of those experiences. A mindful reading of the theory makes it evident that the researchers provided a narrative in such a way that it is meaningful to a wide range of healthcare professionals in clinical and community care.
Interpretative	• It is beyond providing mere descriptive details of participants' experiences and perspectives • Enables readers to distinguish between participants' experiences and researchers' interpretations of their words and phrases • Provides a balanced account of participants' experiences and the researcher's interpretation of those views in connection to the context, situations, history, and knowledge	Ali et al. (2022) explored the perspectives of Pakistani men and women about the role expectations of husband and wife and how the fulfillment of such spousal role expectations can influence marital conflict and intimate partner violence. They interviewed 41 participants from Pakistan and the Pakistani community in the UK to offer a comparative account of their perspectives in two different environments. The interpretive narrative was made evident by describing participants' perspectives encapsulating the social and cultural realities and biases about gendered roles, marital relations, and violence. The accounts of the roles of women and men from the participants' perspective were interpreted in comparison with the social beliefs of men taking the lead role and women as submissive family members. The findings were presented so that the social reasons contributing to participants' views of role expectations and the issues leading to conflicts and violence were made apparent. There was a clear balance between the researchers' interpretation and the actual views of the participants. The researchers offered an interpretation of how and why the change in environment and western culture (i.e., living in the United Kingdom) did not affect men's and women's perspectives about the stereotypical roles of men and women in marriage, household, and society.

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Component	Characteristics	Exemplar
Relational	• Offers an account of study methods, data, and findings in relation to the environment, social and cultural situations, and other individuals influencing participants' accounts and experiences • Provides a vivid account of participants' experiences, feelings, and emotions in relation to their living world and environments • Avoids the stereotypical, racial, sexist, and derogatory connections among participants and their cultures and societies	Vinoski Thomas et al. (2019) explored how women with visible physical disabilities view body image and body functionality. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, they interviewed 15 women with physical disabilities. In their narrative, the researchers made explicit how they ensured that their personal biases and assumptions about body image and functionality did not influence their interpretation of participants' experiences. They practiced reflexivity and member checking to ensure they captured a genuine account of those experiences. They offered methodological details about the use of unedited quotes with filler phrases serving as dialectical functions. To make the narrative relational, they used the theory of body conceptualization as the underpinning framework and interpreted their findings considering this theory and the social and cultural beliefs about women with disability. This theory posits that the human body is appraised regarding its aesthetic or appearance (i.e., body-as-object) as a functioning entity. They provided a vibrant account of body image and functioning in the form of a conceptual framework incorporating participants' views in relation to their living world and environments.
Authentic	• Offers a genuine and representative account of the participants' experiences and viewpoints • Facilitates the detailed reporting of participants' experiences, words, phrases, perspectives, actions, and intentions • Provides an accurate account of participants' experiences in relation to the dominant patterns and themes explaining the studied phenomenon	Woodgate et al. (2017) conducted a phenomenological inquiry to understand the influence of the intersectional social determinants on Indigenous people who become infected with HIV in their youth. To ensure the active involvement of the Indigenous people, the researchers also used a participatory research approach. In total, 21 individuals participated in interviews and shared their accounts. To guarantee the authenticity of participants' experience, the preliminary themes were shared with the community partners and the research team. While providing the account of participants' experiences, the researchers used a story-writing format and presented detailed stories of the study participants using their words, quotes, phrases, and interpretations of their experiences.
Contextualized	• Offers comprehensive details about the context, situation, and setting when describing qualitative methods and findings • Makes explicit the study participants, their communities, settings, ethnicities, cultural orientations, situations, and timeframes • Provides a careful definition and description of the social and cultural setting and the role of the setting in drawing interpretations from the data while making evident researchers' personal biases and interpretations of the data	Zeb et al. (2021) explored the lived experiences of individuals with COPD and the role of the family in their self-care. The authors used a hermeneutical phenomenological approach and interviewed 13 individuals. In their narrative, the contextualized account was very evident in several ways. First, the literature review was placed in the global as well as the local context of Pakistan and its northern areas where the study was conducted. Second, while illustrating participants' experiences, a careful narrative of their sociocultural norms and practices regarding self-care and family dynamics was presented. The cultural setting, community, and situation and its relationship with participants lived experience was made explicit by interpolating the experiences in direct relation to the social and cultural contexts.

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Component	Characteristics	Exemplar
Linked	• Links account of participants' data and researchers' interpretations with the social and cultural context • Makes evident the link between study methods, research questions, and study findings	Denneson et al. (2020) used a modified grounded theory approach to unravel the gender differences in the development of suicidal behaviors and risk among U.S. veterans. The authors interviewed 25 male and 25 female veterans within a larger mixed methods study focused on examining gender differences in risk and recovery among veterans. Using the sociological literature about gender differences in suicidal behaviors of men and women and the stereotypes and presumed social views about the gendered nature of suicidal behaviors, throughout their narrative, the authors provided explicit justification of the methods, included modifications in the methods, and linked those to the study findings. They used an excellent tabular comparison of men and women and their accounts of suicidal behaviors and linked them to sociological concepts.
Emic	• Offers a person-centered account of experiences, viewpoints, mannerisms, gestures, and ways of interaction • Encapsulates the participants' culture, social community, and living world in relation to other participants • Offers micro details of the society and culture about the studied phenomenon	Mohamed and Beagan (2019) conducted a qualitative inquiry with 13 racialized and Indigenous academics at canadian universities to explore and examine the experiences of everyday racism in terms of subtle and overt racism and colonialism. This study was drawn from a larger qualitative study of inclusion and belonging. The researchers provided a narrative of participants' experiences to make explicit imperceptible micro-level interactions and experiences of racism and marginalization. The emic narrative was evident in two ways. First, throughout the narrative, the researchers used participants' names and their words and phrases, in addition to direct quotes, to illustrate their experiences of racism, inclusion, and belonging. Second, the experiences of the participants were compared with each other and with the broader academic culture and norms.

Note. The examples in the table have been classified under the most relevant narrative type, despite fitting under more than one narrative type.

narrative of participants' accounts, researchers should detach themselves from preconceived biases, views, and social and cultural stereotypes to obtain an impartial perspective of participants (Tjale & De Villiers, 2004). Although providing a bias-free and pure emic narrative is often not possible, researchers can address this issue by segregating their interpretations within the narrative using square brackets or italics, or other artistic and creative methods. Researchers should be attentive to reflexivity in data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting when attempting to understand the participants' experience and framing the emic narrative to offer thick description (Rossman & Rallis, 2016).

In Table 1, we offer examples of narratives from published peer-reviewed journal articles. The narratives were selected based on the researchers' judgment and the belief that they provided a thick description of the study methods and findings with illustrative examples.

Discussion

In the current era, qualitative research has been accepted as a critical research methodology in the health, social, and behavioral sciences to explore, understand, and evaluate intricate human behaviors and health and social phenomena, participants' experiences and perspectives, indicators of behaviors, and factors influencing uptake of interventions (Polit & Beck, 2017; Younas et al., 2022). Therefore, it is essential that qualitative research is presented in the most accessible and comprehensive manner so that readers can make full use of the findings to inform future research, practice, and policymaking. The rigor, transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and analytical generalization (i.e., generalization of theory and conceptual meaning of human experience to a wider population (Firestone, 1993)) are contingent, among other factors (e.g., sound methodology audit trail) on the thick description of methods and findings. The methodological literature on qualitative research offers limited practical guidance about thick description and what it entails in actual reporting (Brown & Coombe, 2015; Younas et al., 2022). To address this gap, we presented the innovative MIRACLE framework to enhance the quality of thick description in qualitative research.

There are several anticipated advantages of the MIRACLE framework. First, it serves as a structured process for

researchers to plan how to enhance the thick description of qualitative research from the conceptualization of the research project. Rather than considering it as an afterthought, Polit and Beck (2010) emphasized that researchers should be concerned about the consequences of providing superficial research findings and methods for the applicability of their evidence to a wider audience and knowledge base. Along the same line, when researchers are conscious of the need to provide the MIRACLE narrative of their research, it has the potential to ensure that such narratives are captured during the conduct of the research, thereby improving the quality and robustness of the evidence generated from qualitative research. Second, the MIRACLE framework can be a potentially useful teaching tool for qualitative research educators and mentors to incorporate into their teaching. During our teaching, students often ask about the meaning of thick description in qualitative research. Hence, this framework is offered to provide students with a clear understanding of how to think about and improve thick description. Third, the framework could also be incorporated into existing qualitative reporting and appraisal toolkits and checklists to provide a more tangible approach to understanding thick description. Finally, we hope that the use of this framework can improve and become a driver to augment the transferability and analytical generalization of qualitative research findings, as researchers are better able to assess the reporting of qualitative research.

While we proposed various components in the MIRACLE framework, not all these components may apply to all qualitative research types. Researchers can choose the components more pertinent to a particular qualitative research design or approach, purpose, target audience, and journal and then choose the most appropriate narrative/s to provide thick description. Some challenges to using this framework may include the idea of grasping the complexity of its components, making distinctions among these components, and choosing which narrative is more pertinent to address the needs of each specific type of qualitative approach. While the MIRACLE narrative

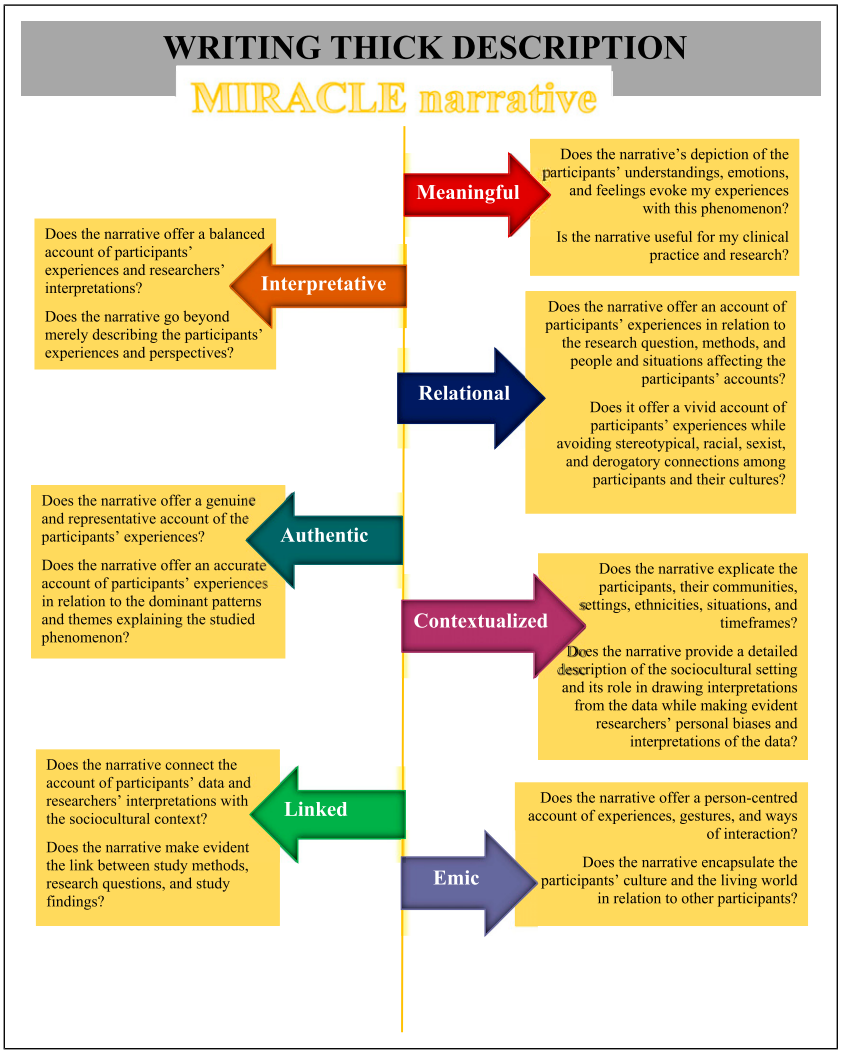

Figure 1. MIRACLE framework and evaluation questions.

framework may appear to provide complex and redundant information about the proposed components, there are clear distinctions between the narratives. For instance, the authentic narrative can be considered similar to the meaningful and emic narratives. However, whereas the former focuses on making all the participants' experiences explicit (i.e., as if it were a story written by the participants themselves), the meaningful narrative prioritizes those experiences pertinent to the particular group of stakeholders for whom the narrative was written. Similarly, the emic narrative differentiates itself from the authentic narrative by adopting a broader perspective by requiring the presentation of individual narratives in relation to their sociocultural environments (i.e., approaching the community as a whole). Emic refers to the level of participants or their entire communities. Therefore, in the emic narrative, there are fewer specifics about individuals and more about their community or culture. In the same vein, the contextualized narrative may have some similar features to the relational narrative but is distinct in terms of the extent and focus of the description. The contextualized narrative is primarily concerned with the various components of the context without focusing on their interrelationships. For instance, a researcher can provide a detailed account of the participants' experiences in their work and family dimensions without making explicit the relationships between those experiences, which would be pertinent to a relational narrative. Nevertheless, we offered practical studies examples, and the strategies under each narrative type can help make a clear distinction among these narratives. In terms of choosing the right type of narrative for a specific research project, for example, based on our experiences of conducting and writing qualitative research, we suggest that relational, authentic, and emic narratives can be more relevant to both descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative research while interpretative and contextualized narratives could be more pertinent to hermeneutical phenomenology only. The relational narrative is more pertinent to grounded theory studies focusing on cross-cultural phenomena or interactional processes.

To illustrate the practical application of this framework and to provide greater clarity regarding the distinctions between the narratives, in Figure 1 we show the key guiding questions to ask under each component of the MIRACLE framework. The guiding questions can be helpful in several ways. First, researchers and readers of qualitative research can use these guiding questions to assess the type of narrative provided and choose what questions are more applicable for them to incorporate while writing their qualitative studies. Second, researchers can use the framework and guiding questions with existing critical appraisal checklists of qualitative studies to provide a thick description.

Limitations

We developed this framework based on a nonsystematic review of literature, which did not include a formal quality rating and appraisal of the included literature using checklists and tools. Adopting a critical review method, we used our judgments and interpretations to identify various components of this framework. The subjective nature of the critical review method may have affected the development of this framework. Therefore, the framework will likely be refined after being applied to several qualitative studies. In this process, the refinement of the framework will also need to consider the relevance (or lack thereof) of particular narratives for specific qualitative approaches and the subtle variations in narratives depending on the approach taken.

Conclusions

Innovative and practical methods are useful in improving the quality of qualitative research, thereby making it more valuable and accessible to practitioners and researchers for informing practice, policymaking, and further research. The proposed MIRACLE framework is a straightforward yet comprehensive tool for improving the reporting quality of qualitative studies, particularly in cross-cultural research. Based on our proposed framework, thick description can be defined as a narrative of participants experiences and perspectives which is meaningful, interpretative, relational, authentic, contextual, linked, and emic view of participants and interconnected contexts.

The proposed seven components of the framework offer a vantage point to report varied aspects of qualitative research, such as the context, person-centered account, and the transformation of experiences in relation to stagnant and evolving sociocultural norms and practices. This framework has the potential to allow researchers to translate participants' rich experiences in a more balanced manner for and across a range of audiences and stakeholders. We hope that if the framework is adopted and incorporated for reporting qualitative research, it can contribute to boosting the transferability and analytical generalization of qualitative research findings.). By using the seven types of narrative to enhance thick description, researchers may offer better knowledge and linkages with existing knowledge about any given phenomenon.

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