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## **INTERNATIONAL PAPER COMPETITION 2022**

### **NOVICE RESEARCHERS' WEAKNESSES IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WRITING**

Sub-Theme (Language and Linguistics)

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# Novice Researchers' Weaknesses in Qualitative Research Writing

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**Abstract:** Qualitative research is usually conducted using descriptive or exploratory research designs whereby the goal of the study is to understand the phenomenon from the participant's perspective. Therefore, qualitative research reports usually contain rich descriptions to elucidate their meanings and the researcher needs to ensure that their experiences and opinions are clearly delineated. However, before qualitative researchers can reach this stage, they should comply with research reporting conventions. This study examined the weaknesses of novice researchers in reporting qualitative research results. The specific aspects examined were: (1) reporting of main analytic findings, and (2) inclusion of evidence in qualitative results. The participants were 151 undergraduate students in a Malaysian university who were enrolled in a research method course. They were given two newspaper articles to analyse and asked to present their results as a concept map and a write-up with excerpts. Analysis of their compliance with research writing conventions showed that only 24.84% of 151 participants wrote an analysis that had "the smell of research". A majority wrote "essay pieces" by extracting information from the articles, but did not present their analysis results. A majority did not know how to introduce their results with the purpose of the analysis, and the kinds of texts analysed. In the write-up, they also failed to make reference to the concept map and excerpts from the articles. The participants could represent the relationship among themes and sub-themes in the concept map but many failed to provide an appropriate heading for the figure. As much as 94.12% of the participants did not conclude their write-up by highlighting the main outcomes of their analysis. The findings revealed the weaknesses in qualitative research writing which deserve attention in postgraduate pursuit and research method courses.

**Keywords:** Qualitative research; Research Reporting; Novice Researcher; Journal Paper; Thesis

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## 1. Introduction

Qualitative research is usually conducted using descriptive or exploratory research designs whereby the goal of the study is to understand the phenomenon from the participant's perspective. Therefore, qualitative research reports usually contain rich descriptions to elucidate their meanings and the researcher needs to ensure that their experiences and opinions are clearly delineated. However, before qualitative researchers can reach this stage, they should comply with basic research reporting conventions.

The past findings on qualitative research writing indicate that novice researchers lack the ability to make convincing arguments based on their analysis of the texts. Wang's (2013) study in China found that novice researchers lack qualitative research writing ability due to their lack of disciplinary knowledge and unfamiliarity with research writing as a form of argumentative writing [1]. "Writing is a form of thinking" (Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1996, p. 119) [2]. Unlike quantitative research writing, where the reporting of results is an outcome of the data analysis, the writing and the analysis are intertwined in qualitative research writing. To Alvermann et al. (1996, p. 119), writing is a method of inquiry, that is, "a way of knowing the human experience in all its complex and diverse representations [which] constantly creates and recreates that experience" [2].

A challenge confronting analysis of qualitative data is the immense amount of data which need to be analysed as well as "the skills of cogent argumentation and economy of expression" (Lindlof, 2001) [3]. This is why it is important for qualitative researchers to know the kind of story they wish to tell through the data (Holley & Colyar, 2012) [4]. Failure in this respect would lead to unclear arguments.