The FACTS: A Mnemonic for the Rapid Assessment of Rigor in Qualitative Research Studies

Research literacy is an essential competency for nursing practice and is concerned with locating, understanding, and critically evaluating evidence for application (Jakubec, 2015). Qualitative research, with goals of understanding how people make sense of their experiences and how these experiences are organized, is particularly appropriate for the discipline and practice of nursing. Although several complex frameworks for the appraisal of rigor have been developed (Ryan-Nicolls & Will, 2009; Shenton, 2004), assessing rigor in qualitative research remains a challenging research literacy activity for beginning learners, who often mistakenly apply quantitative evaluation techniques to qualitative studies (Locke, Silverman, & Spriduso, 2010). The goal of this article is to share a mnemonic strategy for the rapid and basic assessment of the rigor of qualitative research studies.

The Mnemonic Strategy

The qualitative FACTS (Fittingness, Auditability, Credibility, Trustworthiness, Saturation) are explained as part of a larger discussion of qualitative research and appraisal (El Hussein, Jakubec, & Osuji, 2015).

Fittingness. Fittingness (also called transferability) is the ability of the researcher to demonstrate that his or her findings have meaning to others in similar situations. Fittingness depends on the degree of similarity between two contexts, where research consumers appraise findings as being applicable to their setting.

Auditability. Auditability, or confirmability, is the systematic record keeping of all methodological decisions, such as a record of the sources of data, sampling, decisions, and analytical procedures and their implementation. Such an “audit trail” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243) shows the confirmability of research findings through recorded evidence over time that another individual can logically follow to the conclusions provided.

Credibility. Credibility also relates to how vivid and faithful the description of the phenomenon is communicated in the study; that is, the description is so vivid that individuals who have had the experience would recognize it as their own (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is a concept in qualitative research that encompasses all of the above-mentioned steps and refers to the degree of confidence one has in the data and overall findings. Taken together, these aspects of the evaluation, or rigor, require appraisal that the necessary steps have been taken and are thoroughly described in a way to ensure that the study procedures meet high standards and that the results can be trusted.

Saturation. Saturation is explained as occurring in qualitative research when the researcher no longer observes new information and adding more data would be of no further value to the analysis. Evaluating saturation is important in some but not in all qualitative papers, such as narrative inquiries (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

Educator and Student Feedback

The FACTS mnemonic strategy supports the teaching and learning of the rapid appraisal of the rigor in qualitative studies. Beginning students in research literacy often find critical appraisal as a daunting task. Research literacy educators have found that the FACTS strategy facilitated interest and engagement in sophisticated concepts and previously tedious lessons. Techniques for simplifying the complex language of research interested the students and, anecdotally, supported their recall. Student feedback also shows promise for the innovation in enabling broader consistency in appraisal and expanding the scope of use of qualitative findings in nursing practice. Formal evaluation of the application of the teaching-learning strategy, as well as outcomes related to research literacy and utilization, will be important next steps for this teaching and learning innovation.

References


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