A Biographical Narrative Analysis of the Challenges of Applied Linguists across Different Research Abilities to Conduct Qualitative Studies

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Abstract

Conducting qualitative research in applied linguistics seems to have some challenges. Hence, this study aimed to investigate the challenges of applied linguists across different research abilities to conduct qualitative studies. To that end, the biographical narratives, authored by 13 applied linguists, were collected. Then, the narratives were analyzed through qualitative data analysis principles, including organizing and familiarizing, coding and reducing, and interpreting and presenting (Ary et al., 2014). The findings showed that applied linguists face four challenges: methodological issues, technical issues, ethical issues, and qualitative research dissemination while doing qualitative research. The findings also indicated similarities and differences among applied linguists' challenges across different research abilities. It can be concluded that teaching qualitative research is more than mere lecturing about qualitative concepts. Thus, there should be practice-based instruction on qualitative research for applied linguistics students. Moreover, there should be a community for addressing pedagogical dialogs among applied linguists about doing qualitative research.

Keywords: Qualitative research, Applied linguistics, Research challenges, Cross-sectional study

Qualitative research stems from the philosophy of constructivism, which concentrates on the relationships between individuals and the world. By focusing on the uniqueness of the social realities (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014), qualitative research attempts to understand human behaviors through the meanings which they produce in their communities. Thus, the qualitative inquirers use "emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places understudy, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or theme" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44) to achieve understandable and responsive descriptions and interpretations of the problems. It follows then that such qualitative studies can be used when addressing problems across different disciplines. This characteristic originates from the "interpretative" and "naturalistic" essence of qualitative research in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), suggesting that qualitative research can be used by researchers across different disciplines to address the fundamental issues.

Applied linguistics is considered an interdisciplinary field (Carter, 2005), which is "trying to resolve language-based problems that people encounter in the real world" (Grabe, 2001, p. 25). Applied linguistics includes language acquisition, psycholinguistics, language teaching and learning, discourse analysis, etc. (Davies, 2007). Consequently, applied linguists approach language-based problems to investigate and describe the problems, find solutions for them, and obtain a deep understanding of the realities of teaching and learning a language (Heigham & Croker, 2009). As stated earlier, qualitative research aims to investigate and interpret social realities; consequently, if one thinks of applied linguistics as a community of practice; then, qualitative research can be used to investigate the language-based problems happening for those heading for learning a language. Moreover,

applied linguistics involves social and cultural issues that can be addressed through the different methodologies of qualitative research. Qualitative research characteristics such as "concern for context and meaning, human as an instrument, descriptive data, emergent design, inductive analysis" (Ary et al., 2014, pp. 451-452) are facilitative to help applied linguists to address social and cultural issues.

However, conducting qualitative research is not without its challenges (Holloway & Todres, 2007) in different disciplines, including applied linguistics. Although there is a paucity of investigation about the challenges of conducting qualitative research in the field of applied linguistics, it can be claimed that the challenges can be divided into internal and external factors. The internal factors refer to qualitative studies' characteristics and requirements, such as data collection and analysis. The external factors refer to the researcher's ability to do qualitative study and the community of practice perceptions about conducting qualitative research. However, it is an essential topic in applied linguistics to see what leads or hinders applied linguists to conduct qualitative studies. The current study was exploratory to find the challenges of conducting qualitative research in applied linguistics. Accordingly, the findings of the current study can help applied linguists to understand the origin of problems hindering the researchers of the field from conducting qualitative research. Later, they can provide educational implications for helping the less experienced researchers to run qualitative studies. Nevertheless, to obtain a comprehensive picture of applied linguists' challenges to conducting qualitative research, the researcher needed to examine these challenges across the applied linguists with different research abilities. Hence, this study was a cross-sectional one to investigate the challenges of conducting qualitative studies among applied linguists across different research abilities.

Literature Review

Qualitative research: Philosophical assumptions

Philosophical assumptions are the inevitable parts of doing every research instilled in the researchers through different sources such as education, the community of practice, etc. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Let alone their sources, philosophical assumptions, explicitly or implicitly, drive researchers to choose their research theories and paths. Moreover, philosophical assumptions are dynamic in that the researchers can change them during their research. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), there are four major philosophical assumptions for qualitative research, including "ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research)" (p. 54). Each of these philosophical assumptions directs the qualitative researchers into specific issues.

Firstly, the qualitative research focusing on multiple realities refers to ontological issues. When doing ontological qualitative research, the researchers use multiple forms of evidence to present different perspectives. The particular characteristic of ontological qualitative research is its reliance on reality's multiplicity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Secondly, the qualitative epistemological researchers aim to become closer and closer to the participants to know their experiences. In qualitative epistemological research, the researchers attempt to decrease the "objective separateness" between participants and themselves (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94). Thirdly, the axiological qualitative researchers admit that qualitative research is value-laden and with bias. In such qualitative research, the researchers overtly include their interpretations of the narratives alongside the participants (Berger, 2015). Finally, the methodological assumption of qualitative research

is "characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 55). The qualitative research methodology is flexible in that qualitative researchers will be able to modify the research procedures emergently to obtain better findings. It is highly important to mention that these assumptions can be combined in different studies by the researchers to benefit from their characteristics.

Applied linguists can follow each of these philosophical assumptions to do their studies. Lazaraton, Riggenbach, and Ediger (1987, p. 264) admitted that "qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis are important for the types of questions asked in applied linguistics research." The qualitative researchers in the field of applied linguistics can use ontological assumptions to establish their research in a way to find different perspectives about an issue. Moreover, researchers can address the issues that concentrate on the individuals' insider view and their experiences through epistemological assumptions. Furthermore, in axiological qualitative research, applied linguists can create a value-based interpretation of the issue in conjunction with the participants. Finally, the methodological qualitative research studies help the applied linguists provide a detailed generalization and description of applied linguistics issues.

Qualitative research in applied linguistics

Benson (2013) stated that qualitative research in applied linguistics is a kind of research that "relies mainly on the reduction of data to words (codes, labels, categorization systems, narratives, etc.) and interpretative argument" (p. 1). Hence, qualitative studies in applied linguistics have their specific data collections, analyses, and interpretations. However, qualitative studies in applied linguistics have started to capture the applied linguists' attention later

than other social sciences (Benson, 2013). Moreover, it is believed that there is a discrepancy in the publication of qualitative studies by the world-leading journals such as the *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, *The Modern Language Journal*, *Applied Linguistics*, and *TESOL Quarterly* (Benson, Chik, Gao, Huang, & Wang, 2009; Lew, Yang, Harklau, 2018; Richards, 2009).

One of the reasons that qualitative research was not, or still is not, concentrated by applied linguists is the dilemma of validity and reliability (Richards, 2009). The long-lasting arguments proposed by the quantitative research proponents were that since qualitative research is subjective, their findings cannot be reliable and valid. However, it is highly important to mention that the qualitative researchers address validity and reliability under a new terminology called rigor. Rigor includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ary et al., 2014). Credibility in qualitative research is similar to internal validity in quantitative research, which concerns the accuracy of the findings. Transferability in qualitative research, which corresponds to the external validity of the quantitative research, is the degree to which the findings can be generalized to other settings. Dependability, moreover, is another concept in qualitative research concerning the consistency of the findings. It is what the quantitative researchers called reliability. Finally, confirmability in qualitative research, equivalents to objectivity in quantitative research, concerns how the research is free from bias.

Most of the qualitative studies in applied linguistics address teaching and learning English as a second/foreign language (Lew et al., 2018). Moreover, qualitative researchers have addressed teacher education frequently. Furthermore, applied linguists have paid attention, although not significantly, to topics such as heritage language, multilingualism, text analysis, language ideologies, etc. by using qualitative methodology. Nevertheless, qualitative

research in applied linguistics is "leaving much potential for future exploration" (Lew et al., 2018, p. 84) with different methodologies to delve into different topics.

There are different types of qualitative research methodologies that can be used in qualitative research studies. Among these qualitative methodologies are basic qualitative, case study, ethnography, content analysis, grounded theory, narrative research, phenomenological research, historical research (Ary et al., 2014). Table 1 shows the characteristics of qualitative research methodology types extracted from Ary et al. (2014, p. 452).

Table 1.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research Methodology Types (Extracted from Ary et al., 2014, p. 452)

Types of qualitative research methodology	Key characteristics
Basic qualitative	Has its roots in the social sciences Describes and interprets a phenomenon or process Seeks to understand participants' point of view Identifies recurrent patterns or themes Can be based on a variety of disciplinary lenses May use a variety of data collection techniques
Case study	Has multidisciplinary roots (business, law, medicine) Focuses on a single unit Produces an in-depth description Is anchored in real life Uses multiple data collection techniques Provides a rich, holistic description of context, issue Time spent examining the "unit" is important
Ethnography	Has its roots in anthropology Studies the naturally occurring behavior of a group Focuses on culture and societal behavior Describes beliefs, values, and attitudes of a group Observation is the primary data collection tool

Types of qualitative research methodology	Key characteristics
	Immersion in the site is important Provides a holistic description of context and cultural themes
Content analysis	Has its roots in communication studies Uses analysis of written or visual materials Describes the characteristics of the materials Can be quantitative and qualitative
Grounded theory	Has its roots in sociology Its goal is to build a theory about a practice or inductively Phenomenon Is "grounded" in the real world Is a cyclical process of building a tentative theory and testing it against the data Interviews and observation are the primary data collection tools Typically involves observations and interviews with multiple participants or settings Uses a coding process that ends in description and presentation of theory and propositions
Narrative research	Has its roots in different humanities disciplines Focuses on stories about their lives told by individuals Stories may be spoken or written Emphasizes sequence and chronology Emphasizes the collaborative re-storying process Seeks to understand the lived experience of an individual or small group
Phenomenological research	Has its roots in philosophy Is concerned with the essence of a phenomenon Interprets the meaning of the participant's experience Includes investigator's firsthand experiences The interview is the primary data collection tool Typically interviews multiple subjects Attempts to determine the meaning of statements

Types of qualitative research methodology	Key characteristics
	Provides a rich description of invariant structures (common characteristics or essences)
Historical research	Has its roots in the study of history Focuses on the past Written documents and artifacts are the primary data sources Seeks to authenticate sources and determine their consistency with other artifacts and documents

The researchers do not pay the deserved attention to empirical studies about applied linguists' challenges to conduct qualitative studies. However, some studies investigated the issue across different disciplines, including ELT higher education (Bakhshi, Weisi, & Yousofi, 2019a; Bakhshi, Weisi, & Yousofi, 2019b). In a study conducted by Bakhshi et al. (2019a), the challenges of conducting qualitative studies were investigated among Iranian ELT Ph.D. students and faculty members. By collecting data through researcher-made questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, Bakhshi et al. (2019a) indicated that the primary challenges of Ph.D. students to conduct qualitative studies were lack of time and the underdevelopment Iranian educational system. Moreover, faculty members believed that lack of time is the most important challenge of conducting qualitative studies. In a similar vein, the results of the study by Bakhshi et al. (2019b) showed that ELT faculty members believed that lack of qualitative courses in the postgraduate ELT syllabus, being time-consuming, and the dominance of positivism in the Iranian educational system were among the challenges of conducting qualitative studies. Although these studies are valuable, the researcher believes that more studies should be conducted to show why conducting qualitative research studies is daunting for applied linguists. Furthermore, it is necessary to obtain the challenges of conducting qualitative studies across the

applied linguists' research abilities. It means that we need to know the challenges for the novice and experienced applied linguistics researchers. Such a study can help obtain solutions for the challenges to help applied linguists become qualitative researchers.

Method

The current study had a cross-sectional qualitative methodology to obtain and analyze data. Cross-sectional research refers to the study in which the researchers collect data at a single point in time from a group of participants across different levels regarding an attribute under investigation (Phakiti, De Costa, Plonsky, & Starfeld, 2018). Hence, the cross-sectional research can be used to obtain the trends through which an issue is happening in a group of participants who are the members of the same community of practice with varied possession of the characteristic or attribute. It is believed that cross-sectional research is cost-benefit and time-efficient (Ary et al., 2014). Given that, in the current study, the researcher tried to investigate the challenges facing Iranian applied linguists when doing qualitative research.

Participants

The participants of this study were recruited based on a purposive sampling in that the researcher asked the Iranian applied linguists who had already conducted at least one qualitative research to raise the challenges they had at the time of conducting the current study. To that end, the participants were the applied linguists whose research experiences ranged from one to 20 years. The first group had at least one year of doing qualitative research, the second group had two to five years of doing qualitative research, the third group had six to 10 years of doing qualitative research, the fourth group had 11 to 15 years of doing qualitative research, and the fifth group had 16 to 20

years of doing qualitative research. The researcher did his best to have at least two applied linguists in each group. Overall, 13 applied linguists participated in this study. Table 2 shows the characteristics of the participants.

As can be seen from Table 2, there were four female and nine male participants whose qualitative research experiences ranged from one year to 20 years. Moreover, three of the participants had M.A. degrees in applied linguistics, and 10 of them had Ph.D. degrees in applied linguistics. All of the participants were affiliated with Iranian universities. It is highly important to state that the researcher asked the participants to self-report their years-of-experience in conducting qualitative research. The results of Table 2 were obtained from the responses of the participants.

Table 2.

Characteristics of Applied Linguists Participated in this Study

Group	Pseudonyms	Gender	Academic degree	Years of teaching experiences	Years of qualitative research experiences	Mean years of qualitative research experiences
Group 1	Amir	Male	MA	3	1	1
	Fateme	Female	MA	4	1	
Group 2	Reza	Male	MA	5	2	3.3
	Akbar	Male	PhD	5	3	
	Jalal	Male	PhD	7	5	
Group 3	Hoda	Female	PhD	8	6	7.3
	Karim	Male	PhD	9	6	
	Hassan	Male	PhD	11	10	
Group 4	Baran	Female	PhD	13	11	12.6
	Hamed	Male	PhD	16	12	
	Hasti	Female	PhD	17	15	
Group 5	Taha	Male	PhD	18	17	18.5
	Mostafa	Male	PhD	21	20	

Data: Researchers' Narratives

Narratives authored by the qualitative researchers participating in this study were the source of data. According to De Fina (2015), two main types of narratives can investigate different issues. They are biographical and interactional narratives. The main difference between the two types of narratives is while there is no interaction between the narrators and the researchers in the biographical narratives, interactions between narrators and the researchers are considered crucial in interactional narratives. By producing biographical narratives, the narrators use their ability to create a coherent self (Freeman, 2015) in which they mirror their current status when a particular issue is under investigation.

In the current study, since there were no interactions between the researcher and the narrators, biographical narratives had been collected. The researcher asked the participants to write a narrative about the challenges facing them while doing qualitative research. The prompt of the narrative was, "Doing qualitative research in the field of applied linguistics is not without challenges. That said, as an applied linguist who has already conducted qualitative research about different topics, please kindly write your narrative of the challenges you had during different time intervals of conducting qualitative research (from doing to publishing, etc.)." The participants were allowed to use English or Persian (their native language) to write their narratives. It is also important to note that three of the participants, namely, Reza, Hamed, and Taha, produced oral narratives by recording their voices and sending them to the researcher. The mean length of the written narratives and the orally produced narratives (after transcription) was about 350 words. All of the narratives, to some extent, followed a structure in which there was an introduction, elaboration on main challenges, and a short conclusion.

Data Analysis

To specify the main themes mentioned in the researchers' narratives, the researcher analyzed the content of the narratives authored by the participants through three qualitative data analysis stages, including organizing and familiarizing, coding and reducing, and interpreting and presenting (Ary et al., 2014). To do the first stage, the researcher used MAXQDA 10 to create a log for each specified group. In the second stage, the researcher used Corbin and Strauss (2008) approach, namely 1) ask questions about the data, 2) make a comparison, 3) consider different meanings, 4) wave the red flag, and 5) think in metaphors and similes to coding and reducing the data. In the final stage, the researcher tried to provide a plausible interpretation of the obtained themes. Figure 1 is an indication of the three stages.

Data   **Interpretation**

… for the time being and after conducting about 8 qualitative research studies on different applied linguistics topics, my main concern is how to address third party issues such as participants' awareness about the research ….

Coding and Reducing → **Main Theme** **Ethical Issues**

Considering ethical issues in qualitative research are very crucial and sometime demanding (Ary et al., 2014). Ethical issues include many important issues such as researchers' relationship to participants, reciprocity, getting different permissions, etc…
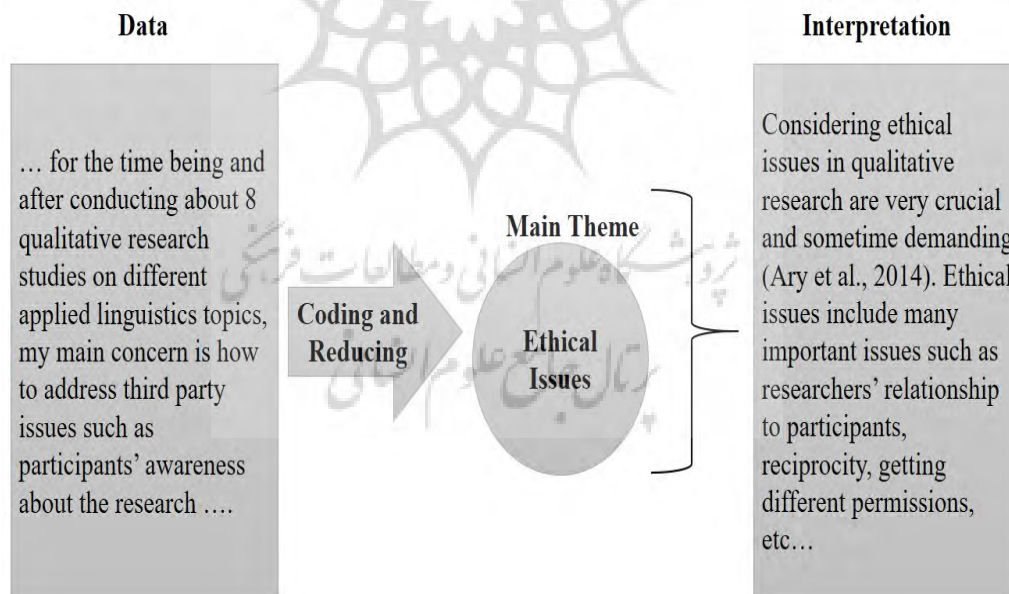
Figure 1. *Data Analysis Procedures (An Example)*

Figure 1, which shows part of the narrative authored by one of the researchers in group four, indicates that ethical issues are the main challenges facing this applied linguist to conduct qualitative research on different topics of applied linguistics.

Results and Discussion

After analyzing the narratives authored by the qualitative researchers, four main challenges were obtained as the main issues of conducting qualitative research among applied linguists. Table 3 shows the challenges.

Table 3.

The Main Challenges of Conducting Qualitative Research in Applied Linguistics

Groups	Mean years of qualitative research experiences	Main challenges
Group 1	1	Methodological issues Technical issues
Group 2	3.3	Methodological issue Technical issues
Group 3	7.3	Technical issues Ethical issues
Group 4	12.6	Technical issues Ethical issues
Group 5	18.5	Qualitative research dissemination

As shown in Table 3, the applied linguists asserted that the challenges they faced while doing qualitative research are methodological issues, technical issues, ethical issues, and qualitative research dissemination. Table 4 indicates what each of these challenges refers to.

Table 4.

The Descriptions of Challenges Facing Applied Linguists to Conduct Qualitative Research

Challenges	Descriptions
Methodological issues	Referring to which qualitative research methodologies should be used in a study (e.g., phenomenological, narrative, grounded theory, etc.)
Technical issues	Referring to technical issues related to different qualitative methodologies such as data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, the rigor of the study, writing qualitative research, etc.
Ethical issues	Referring to how to address the ethical issues in qualitative studies, such as researcher and participant relationships, data obtained, different necessary permissions, etc.
Qualitative research dissemination	Referring to challenges existing in publishing qualitative research in applied linguistics, such as journals' policies.

Challenge 1: Methodological Issues

One of the challenges obtained from the qualitative researchers' narratives refers to methodological issues. The methodological challenges were found in the narratives of group 1 and group 2. This means that methodological issues are common challenges for applied linguists conducting qualitative research for less than five years. Methodological issues consist of different aspects, such as which types of research assumptions need to be used to conduct qualitative research in applied linguistics.

Extract 1 (Fateme)

… we heard different research assumptions for doing qualitative studies; however, it is not easy to practice them in reality …

Extract 2 (Jalal)

… it is important to know about the main assumptions of qualitative research if one aims to address topics of applied linguistics … what assumptions say what and when should be used, I think, are difficult …

As shown through the narratives, Fateme and Jalal knew that there are different assumptions for doing qualitative research, but their problem is how to use them in their research. It can be stated that there is no clear-cut distinction among qualitative research assumptions, theories, and paradigms (Creswell & Poth, 2018) for these participants. This leads to the challenge that qualitative research methodologies should be used to address the topics.

Extract 3 (Akbar)

… Since doing qualitative research is controversial in some topics, it is not easy for me to choose among qualitative research methodologies …

Extract 4 (Reza)

… what are the differences among different qualitative research methodologies, for instance, narrative inquiry and phenomenological one… selecting among them is a difficult task …

There are different challenges in each of the qualitative research methodologies, such as narrative inquiry, phenomenological research, case studies, etc. making doing qualitative research difficult for the applied linguists, especially those in their early stages of doing research. For instance, narrative inquiry is not the mere content analysis, and it is not easy to use thematic approaches to analyze the narratives (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008). Moreover, as Richards (2003, p. 29) stated, "the inexperienced researcher will be deceived into thinking that the case study is merely a matter of description and detail alone is enough." Suppose qualitative research methodologies are not described in their complete and complex forms to the applied linguistics researchers during the educational courses. In that case, they may become confused about which one to be used.

Challenge 2: Technical Issues

The second challenges facing applied linguists while doing qualitative research were technical issues. These challenges were critical in that they have been referred to by groups 1, 2, 3, and 4. This means that such challenges are fundamental and need to be considered. Moreover, technical issues have a wide range of issues such as data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, the rigor of the study, writing qualitative research, etc.

Extract 5 (Karim)

… after doing several qualitative studies, it is not clear what writing style I should follow …

Reporting qualitative research is a difficult task, especially for novice researchers. It is so because it is not easy for qualitative researchers to choose what to include and not to include in their research reports (Ary et al., 2014). Moreover, the journals' policy on preparing qualitative research reports is not the same, making it even more difficult for qualitative researchers to report their qualitative research. Other technical issues of doing qualitative research in applied linguistics are data collection and data analysis.

Extract 6 (Amir)

…data collection and, more importantly, data analysis are the main issues hindering me from conducting qualitative research …

Extract 7 (Hassan)

…the nature of data collection and data analysis in qualitative research is rather time-consuming …

Extract 8 (Hoda)

… Data analysis is the main challenge I have to do qualitative research… comparing to quantitative research. I think qualitative research data analysis is more difficult for me …

Different types of qualitative research studies use multiple tools to collect data, making it difficult for researchers to choose among them. That said, the tools themselves are not without difficulty to be applied. For instance, interviews have some challenging points making them difficult to be used, such as the length of the interviews, which is from two hours to fifteen hours (Woods, 1985) and the authenticity of the interviews (Richards, 2003) in that the informants may not tell the truth.

It is believed that qualitative data analysis is "the most complex and mysterious phase" (Ary et al., 2014; p. 481) of doing qualitative research. Since qualitative researchers encounter copious amounts of data while doing qualitative research, they may see themselves in a complex process that involves reducing and organizing qualitative data. Moreover, one reason makes data analysis a challenging task for the researchers is the nonlinear nature of it, in which the researchers should follow an iterative, recursive, and dynamic process. Maxwell (2005) believes that the process should be described in a way "the experienced qualitative researcher begins data analysis immediately after finishing the first interview or observation, and continues to analyze the data as long as he or she is working on the research, stopping briefly from writing reports and paper" (p. 95). This means that the qualitative researcher is in a cyclical process in which he/she needs to take into account different issues simultaneously, and it is not an easy task.

The qualitative researchers participating in this study also addressed the rigor of qualitative research as a challenging task.

Extract 9 (Akbar)

… the qualitative researchers should address the validity and reliability in their study, and for me, it is not easy…

Extract 10 (Karim)

…the reviewers most of the time ask about the rigor of the study, which is less presented in qualitative research instruction …

Extract 11 (Baran)

… my problems in doing qualitative research can be divided into the quality of the research [rigor of the study] and …

The rigor of study in qualitative research as the equivalent to validity and reliability in quantitative research is an important issue that should be addressed when a researcher conducts qualitative research. However, due to the technical terminologies and technical strategies to address rigor in qualitative studies, it is not easy to be addressed.

Challenge 3: Ethical Issues

Ethical issues were the third challenging themes referred by the participants of the fourth group. The participants in this group just mentioned these challenges as the main challenges of doing qualitative studies when conducting the current study. It can be the source for further research since it was not mentioned by the researchers in groups 1, 2, and 3 who had less experience doing qualitative research in applied linguistics.

Extract 12 (Hamed)

… the reason is that I think of qualitative research more than researching since, as a researcher, I need to enter different relationships with different participants … this will be difficult, of course.

Extract 13 (Baran)

… [difficult issues in qualitative research] and ethical issues by which I mean how to obtain information from my participants to preserve their identity …

According to Ary et al. (2014), ethical issues that should be considered by the qualitative researchers include the kind of information obtained, the

researcher's relationship to participants, reciprocation, and getting permission to conduct research. Each of these ethical issues is difficult for qualitative researchers to address. For instance, when the type of information is concerned, the researchers need to be aware of not being too focused on personal issues that the informant does not have the willingness to provide. Moreover, as the relationship between the researchers and the informants is becoming more and more friendly, the researchers should know that the informants trust them and provide information for them, so the researchers should follow the confidentiality principle to rest assured the informants' mind about their identity. Furthermore, data collection may be time-consuming, so based on the principle of reciprocity, the qualitative researchers need to prepare something in return to the informants. Finally, qualitative researchers need to get the necessary permissions from their informant to conduct the research. All in all, the applied linguist conducting qualitative research should satisfy the privacy of their participants to address ethical issues. However, based on the narratives authored by the participants in the fourth group, it can be found that privacy is not just a matter of being preserved from the part of the qualitative researchers.

Extract 14 (Hasty)

… even though the participants' confidentiality was important for me, the reviewers of my paper ask for more information such as educational level, ethnicity, [etc.] of the participants, which can make them familiar for some readers …

Challenge 4: Qualitative Research Dissemination

Group 5, whose members conducted qualitative research in applied linguistics more than other groups, stated that their most significant challenge was disseminating their qualitative research.

Extract 15 (Taha)

… the main problem, now, is to publish qualitative papers since not many academic journals show promising respects to publish qualitative research …

Extract 16 (Mostafa)

…I think our community of practice is not yet ready to accept doing qualitative research and use the benefits it can have… it shows itself in several qualitative research publication compared to quantitative ones [meaning that the qualitative research publications are less than quantitative ones] …

The studies conducting on the publication trends of different types of research, namely quantitative and qualitative, showed that the number of published papers with qualitative research methodology was less than those with quantitative research methodology (Lazarazon, 2000; Richards, 2009). Such studies showed that qualitative research has not yet found its position in applied linguistics journals. This is a challenging issue for the qualitative researchers in applied linguistics to get their qualitative studies published. One can also argue that such a challenge has its impact on Ph.D. and M.A. students who are working on their dissertations and theses, respectively, in that they become less willing to conduct their studies using qualitative research methodologies.

Conclusion

This cross-sectional study was an attempt to investigate the challenges facing applied linguists to conduct qualitative research. The findings indicated four main challenges: methodological, technical, ethical, and qualitative research dissemination, which hinder applied linguists from conducting qualitative research. Thus, the study confirms some challenges in doing

qualitative research, which has already been mentioned by some previously done studies (e.g., Bakhshi et al., 2019a).

Teaching qualitative research should be more than lecturing on qualitative concepts (Boström, 2019; Kilburn, Nind, & Wiles, 2014). Thus, it is necessary to engage the students of applied linguistics in different practical qualitative research tasks to prepare them for future qualitative research. By so doing, the students will engage in an active way of teaching qualitative research (Boström, 2019), resulting in their reflexivity on their research practices. Here, experienced applied linguists who have already done qualitative research can help the learners come up with challenges such as methodological and technical ones.

The current study's findings indicated that some participants had specific challenges not considered by other groups. For instance, the fourth group did not point out that they had methodological issues in conducting qualitative research, while the first two groups had asserted these issues. Given that, it is necessary to establish a pedagogical dialogue among the applied linguists who conduct qualitative research to discuss different challenges with each other and take benefit from the experience of their community in removing their challenges. The pedagogic experiences dialogues can help applied linguists conduct qualitative research encountering fewer challenges.

One of the challenges pointed out by the participants was their problem in disseminating their qualitative research. It is in line with the results of the study by Benson et al. (2009) in that they believed that a small number of journals publish qualitative studies in language teaching and learning. The researcher believes that there are two solutions to resolve this challenge. First, in international conferences, qualitative researchers can make their community of practice accompany themselves about the benefits of conducting qualitative research in the field of applied linguistics (Richards,

2003). This can lead to a new mainstream of qualitative research in applied linguistics, which changes applied linguistics journals about publishing qualitative research. Second, there should be established new academic journals that specifically pay attention to qualitative research in applied linguistics.

It should be noted that this paper was a qualitative investigation and the researcher aimed to investigate the main challenges facing the qualitative researchers in the field of applied linguistics. Thus, further research can use the challenges obtained in this study to create other research tools such as questionnaires to replicate the study with more participants. Future studies can also address international applied linguists' challenges to see the similarity and differences among them.

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