Describing the Experience of Young Researchers in Interdisciplinary Qualitative Research Based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Using NVivo®

Carolina Lopes Araujo; Eliane Almeida do Carmo and Raiza Gomes Fraga

This paper describes a study pathway carried out by inexperienced researchers to develop interdisciplinary research on international agreements related to sustainable development. The study is based on critical discourse analysis (CDA) and uses NVivo®, a software program for qualitative analysis. Although textual analysis is the basic procedure in research endeavors supported by CDA, texts are not their object of study per se. Instead, the study focus is on causal and ideological effects of texts, on the textual aspect of the social practices, processes, and relations and their effects on power struggles (Fairclough, 2003, p. 16; Resende, 2008, p. 144). CDA methodological procedures consist of the systematic application of sociolinguistic categories (Fairclough, 2010), which helps map the connections between the discursive and the nondiscursive (Resende & Acosta, 2018, p. 248) revealing meaning-making processes linked to different social practices. Difficulties often arise in researchers’ initial forays into qualitative interdisciplinary research. The complexity of CDA analyses, the interdisciplinarity of research, and the inability to define analytical categories in advance are factors that can act as stumbling blocks to inexperienced researchers working with this qualitative approach. The use of software programs to assist in qualitative research may offer substantial advantages (Mozzato, Grzybovski, & Teixeira, 2016), but it may also increase challenges because specific expertise required to operate their tools, which can be achieved only through ongoing use. This paper draws on the collaborative experience of advising a multidisciplinary group of young undergraduate researchers aiming to help them to overcome initial challenges presented in their studies. To facilitate the researchers’ comprehension of the analytical categories and assist them in their analytical efforts, we developed a summary table of the most common sociolinguistic categories. We are aware that such a summarization cannot be exhaustive, but it can support analytical procedures. According to Fairclough (2003, p. 6), textually oriented discourse analysis “is rather ‘labour-intensive’ and can be productively applied to samples of research material rather than large bodies of text”. NVivo® Pro edition 11 coding tools contributed to select corpus excerpts analyzed through sociolinguistic categories’ analytical lens. This experience of guiding an interdisciplinary group of young researchers in conducting a discursive analysis on text of the Agenda 2030 has shown positive learning results and led to scientific publications, proving effectiveness in overcoming the primary difficulties associated with the complexity of the theoretical-methodological CDA approach and the operationalization of NVivo®’s tools. By describing our research experience here, we hope to encourage initiatives to introduce researchers to CDA and increase the use of the NVivo® program, contributing to the development of qualitative research.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis (CDA), NVivo®, interdisciplinarity, undergraduate researchers, sustainable development.

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References


