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THE USE OF CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY METHOD IN RESEARCH: ADOLESCENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION.

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ABSTRACT

This study employs the constructivist grounded theory method introduced by Kathy Charmaz. This method is also a component of grounded theory. The purpose of this study is to examine how the constructivist grounded theory method can assist in researching adolescents' attitudes towards post-secondary education. Future researchers are advised to delay the use of literature in the early chapters. The study adopts a qualitative approach using the CGT method and includes semi-structured interviews to gather information from participants for the development of substantive theory. A total of 30 participants were involved in the study. Data was analyzed using initial coding and focused coding methods and supported by ATLAS.ti software. The findings indicate that adolescents themselves are the key to the strategies implemented. The researcher identified four main themes: perspective, attitude, strategy, and outcome, thus enabling the construction of substantive theory based on these themes. The strategies employed were successful in helping adolescents pursue further education with positive results. The implications of these findings can also be related to existing theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory.

KEY WORDS: Qualitative, grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory, post-SPM adolescents, post-secondary education.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2019, the world was shocked by the threat of COVID-19. In Malaysia, the disease was detected on January 25, 2020. To curb its spread, the government issued various directives and enforced laws, including Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), the Movement Control Order (MCO), the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), and the Enhanced Movement Control Order (EMCO). These measures have transformed the cultural landscape, thinking, lifestyle, and societal perspectives on aspects such as the economy, social life, career, education, and spirituality.

From an educational perspective, the researcher found that many young people who had completed their studies up to Form Five were disinterested and unmotivated to pursue tertiary education. They employed various methods to avoid continuing their studies. As the researcher's home serves as the place where all village

correspondence is kept, they were able to observe this issue. At one point, a teenager disappointed his parents by lying during an application to a private college. This was uncovered when the researcher's mother handed over a letter sent by the postman to the teenager's house. The joy on the mother's face turned to gloom as soon as she saw the name on the letter, which belonged to the teenager's younger sibling, a 17-year-old still in secondary school.

What was even more surprising was that the teenager had discarded two offer letters for further education from public higher education institutions. The question that arises for the researcher is why did the teenager reject the opportunities provided, even though both were fully sponsored without any payment required? The researcher felt very sad and disappointed by the teenager's actions because, before the COVID-19 pandemic, opportunities for young people to continue their studies were scarce. However, after the outbreak, the government provided incentives to attract students to pursue higher education. Unfortunately, these benefits were squandered. Who should be blamed in such cases?

This study aims to answer the questions that led the researcher to investigate the attitudes of SPM school leavers. Since this study is not intended to prove or validate existing theories, the researcher has not formed any initial assumptions. The researcher has chosen the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) method in line with the original goal of exploring the perspectives of SPM leavers towards post-secondary education.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the constructivist grounded theory method can assist in conducting a more in-depth investigation into the attitudes of Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) leavers towards post-secondary education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design Approach, Research Techniques, and Data Collection

In selecting the research design, the use of grounded theory (GT) offers a deep and systematic approach to understanding the study phenomenon according to established processes (Abijo, Huzili, & Hanif, 2018; Hanif, Tengku Kastriafuddin, Zuraidi, & Nor Azmi, 2018; Voon & Amran, 2021). The researcher can interpret the meanings conveyed by participants from their own perspectives and understandings (Nor Junainah, 2019).

Additionally, the researcher employs semi-structured intensive interviews with open-ended yet directed questions for the participants (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Charmaz & Keller, 2016; Adam & Amir, 2020). According to Charmaz (2014), Charmaz and Keller (2016), Othman (2017), and Nor Junainah (2019), recording the audio of interview sessions is crucial as it allows for better focus compared to manual note-taking. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the information provided by the participants, the researcher undertakes all processes involved in question development, conducting interviews, and transcription. This process also includes data coding, memo writing, theoretical sampling, theory development, drafting, and final report writing.

Research Participants

In this study, the participants consist of SPM leavers. Participant selection was carried out using simple random sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling to recruit additional participants (Othman, 2017). Besides ease of contact, willingness to spend time, and readiness to cooperate, it is also assumed that each participant

will share their feelings, views, and beliefs transparently.

Since this study relies entirely on interviews, the researcher conducted a larger number of interviews to ensure more robust and organized results, as suggested by Charmaz (2006). Additionally, theoretical sampling was carried out continuously until theoretical saturation was reached, as proposed by Charmaz (2006), Morse (2007), Othman (2017), and Nor Junainah (2019). The participant selection strategies used by the researcher included simple sampling, purposive sampling, theoretical sampling, and theoretical group interviews, in line with the recommendations of Nor Junainah (2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data Analysis and Theory Construction

In analyzing the study data, the researcher employed initial coding and focused coding methods as recommended by Charmaz (2006, 2014), Abijo, Huzili, and Hanif (2018), Nor Junainah (2019), and Noor Insyiraah et al. (2020). During the initial coding process, the researcher read the transcripts line by line and word by word to classify information into smaller components to form initial codes. The researcher also used ATLAS.ti software to refine, merge, discard, and organize these initial codes. Once the initial codes were generated, the researcher reviewed them to analyze the focused codes. Focused codes are primary codes that can be identified from their frequency in the data (Charmaz, 2006, 2014).

Focused coding involves examining the relationships between each code to develop subcategories and categories (Charmaz, 2014, 2016). After successfully classifying the main categories, the researcher sought to identify themes by examining the relationships between the resulting categories. Additionally, theoretical sampling was conducted after the categories were formed until theoretical saturation was achieved. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), constant comparison should be performed to compare codes with codes, codes with categories, categories with categories, and categories with concepts to develop theory inductively and abductively based on the study data. During the coding process, the researcher used ATLAS.ti software to assist in refining, merging, discarding, and organizing the codes. Additionally, while coding the data, the researcher maintained memos informal notes to elaborate on the processes, assumptions, and actions classified within each category, as suggested by Nor Junainah (2019). Analyzing the relationships between themes allowed the researcher to highlight substantive theory and propose a theoretical model.

Theme Formation

The researcher identified three main categories, which include 28 subcategories. The researcher successfully formed four main themes: perspective, attitude, strategy, and outcome, after examining the relationships between the categories. Based on the findings, the researcher elevated two main categories to form themes. Additionally, the researcher constructed one main theme by combining two categories motivating factors and hindering factors into a single theme, namely perspective. The researcher believes that these two categories are suitable to be combined into one theme because they encompass aspects that influence whether SPM leavers desire to pursue higher education or not. Table 1 below summarizes some of the subcategories, categories, and themes derived from this study.

Table 1: Some Sub categories, Categories, and Themes

Sub categories	Categories	Themes

Sub categories		Categories	Themes
1	Self-Awareness	Motivating Factors	Perspective
2	Desire		
3	Family Support		
4	Economics	Hindering Factors	
5	Study Programs		
6	Self-Reliance		
7	Definition	Attitude	Attitude
8	Financial Access		
9	Higher Education		
10	Higher Education Institutions		
11	Obtaining Support	Problem Solving	Strategy
12	Outcome	Outcome	Outcome

Relationship Between Themes

Based on the themes identified, the researcher observes a strong correlation between perspective and attitude among SPM leavers. Essentially, both motivating and hindering factors, along with the attitudes of these adolescents influenced by their environment, can impact their decision-making actions. The relationship between these two factors is seen to have a profound effect on the thinking patterns of SPM leavers in their efforts to shape a brighter future. Consequently, the self-awareness, perceptions, feelings, and expectations of SPM leavers towards post-secondary education vary according to their levels of acceptance and understanding.

Furthermore, the tendency of adolescents to implement strategies for resolving issues arising before, during, and after pursuing higher education at university is evident in the study. Various suggestions were made by these individuals to relevant parties, including themselves, to ensure their continuation of studies at the university. Some of the strategies proposed have been identified as effective, while others have yet to show any impact. This is because they have not yet experienced the situation.

Substantive Theory and Theoretical Model

This study was conducted to explore in detail the motivating and hindering factors, as well as the interpretations and responses of SPM leavers towards post-secondary education. The researcher concludes that the adolescents themselves are the key to all problem-solving strategies encountered. This conclusion is based on in-depth interviews conducted with 30 SPM leavers from diverse backgrounds. The self-awareness system, influenced by environmental factors, not only shapes the adolescents' attitudes but also leads to the development of strategies and outcomes that can be applied in real life. Additionally, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the theoretical model produced is meant to depict the overall themes derived from the data analysis process.

There are five main components that form the Theoretical Model of Adolescent Perspectives on Post-Secondary Education: (1) adolescents, (2) perspective, (3) attitude, (4) strategy, and (5) outcome. The explanations for these five components are as follows:

I. Adolescents

Adolescents refer to individuals aged between 12 and 17 years, though those aged between 18 and 20 years are still considered in the late adolescent category. In this study, the focus is on late adolescents aged 18 to 19 years, specifically concerning their attitudes towards post-secondary education.

Generally, this group is a crucial asset for the formation of a developed and competitive nation in the future. Without their presence, the country's development sector will be adversely affected, leading to economic decline, which in turn impacts all sectors, including education. This is because if adolescents do not pursue higher education, the broad acquisition of knowledge within society will not be achieved. Moreover, the country's economy might be dominated by foreign nationals. There are even some foreign educators in public and private universities.

This situation is alarming as a shortage of skilled labor in the country could lead to various undesirable scenarios. One potential issue is the risk of the country being re-colonized by external powers. Therefore, responsible parties need to implement various methods to attract adolescents to continue their education at the university level. In addition to the strategies suggested by study participants, methods proposed by authorities should also be applied.

Perspective

The researcher conducted this study to elucidate adolescents' perspectives on post-secondary education. Among the questions often pondered by the researcher are: "What is the view of SPM leavers on the importance of post-secondary education?", "What factors motivate them to pursue higher education?", and "What reasons lead them to avoid continuing their education at the university level?". Based on these questions, the researcher aims to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that either encourage or discourage them from pursuing further education.

According to the theoretical model illustrated in Figure 1, the researcher found that there are two factors influencing SPM leavers' decisions to pursue higher education or not. Motivating factors are the encouragement and support received from their environment to continue their studies at the university. This contrasts with hindering factors, where adolescents do not receive any support or encouragement to continue their education. In fact, some have stated that their families actively discourage them from pursuing higher education.

Such situations have led some SPM leavers to form their own views on the importance of post-secondary education. Indirectly, the strategies they adopt also differ from those who lack self-awareness regarding the significance of higher education.

Attitude

Attitude refers to how adolescents perceive and understand post-secondary education, the role of the government, and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). This attitude is shaped by their perspectives on post-secondary education, which are influenced by their environment. In other words, their hopes, feelings, and expectations are formed based on their individual patterns of thinking.

The study found that adolescents who have completed their secondary education have differing opinions and goals. Those with a strong academic background tend to provide more constructive and quality insights compared to others. This finding is evident when respondents are asked about their understanding of post-secondary education. There are three groups of adolescents who provide

diverse answers. The study reveals that their level of understanding depends on the type of school they attended. Students from boarding schools generally explain post-secondary education more effectively than those from regular secondary schools. However, some students from daily secondary schools also provide insightful and reasonable perspectives.

Furthermore, the determination shown by adolescents to continue their studies at university is commendable, as they make efforts to seek additional information from various sources. In addition to obtaining information from teachers and schools about National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) loans, they also seek information through the internet, social media, and by asking individuals who have pursued higher education. Some realize that university life may require them to work part-time to support themselves. After understanding the reality of university life that demands greater independence, these adolescents decide to pursue their studies with confidence and enthusiasm.

In the context of higher education, adolescents pursue their studies with the intention of repaying their families for raising them with love. Almost all participants encountered by the researcher come from less privileged families. They believe that by continuing their education to a higher level, they can repay the sacrifices and efforts of their parents.

Moreover, adolescents provide views on the learning experience at university, which is considered more challenging compared to secondary school. They also note that various lecturer behaviors impact learning at university, as each lecturer has a unique teaching method that students must follow. They emphasize the importance of quickly adapting to university life to avoid being influenced by cultures that may result in wasting money or engaging in unproductive activities.

Additionally, they express feelings of sadness, fear, and regret for not achieving their expectations. For instance, regret is expressed for not being able to continue their education. This happens because they see some former students struggling to find employment, particularly in the public sector, which offers numerous benefits. Some also express fear of potential bullying while continuing their studies, driven by high-profile reports of bullying cases resulting in death, which have been widely disseminated on social media and television. This fear leads them to decide against pursuing higher education.

Overall, the attitudes of SPM leavers can be categorized into two types: positive and negative. Based on the study, all decisions made by these individuals are influenced by those around them. Their hopes, expectations, and determination are high, aiming to achieve their desires, whether in a positive or negative aspect.

Strategy

The strategies outlined in this study are exclusively problem-solving strategies. Among those employed by the interviewees were seeking support from social media. This strategy aims to ensure that SPM school leavers have access to crucial information for advancing their studies to a higher level. They utilize all the information and insights provided by universities as well as comments from graduates who have successfully completed their studies at a particular university before making any decisions. This is to ensure that the information received aids in facilitating the teaching and learning process.

In addition to employing support-seeking strategies, some participants mentioned that campaigns and motivational talks should be organized by schools and the government to encourage these

individuals to continue their education. This is because school-organized university visits can provide these students with an insight into the culture and environment of a university. Furthermore, programs such as awareness campaigns, "Let's Enter University," "A Step to UiTM," and rural outreach programs organized by the responsible parties can help instill interest and self-motivation for greater success.

Outcome

Based on the strategies implemented, these youths have decided to pursue their studies at universities after receiving adequate exposure from social media platforms and responsible parties. The dissemination of information through social media proves beneficial for the younger generation in this millennium due to their exposure to various technological advancements. Responsible parties must keep pace with the times to deliver information quickly and engagingly.

Additionally, face-to-face information dissemination methods, as used in the past, should also be maintained. This is because not all youths have access to advanced technological facilities. Furthermore, such steps are an initiative by the government to emphasize the importance of higher knowledge for the younger generation, thereby fostering a sense of appreciation among them.

Implications of Study Findings on the Field of Educational Psychology

The model of the Adolescent Perspective on Post-secondary Education is the first model developed to explain the relationship between perspectives, attitudes, strategies, and outcomes among SPM school leavers in Malaysia. This study is also substantive, meaning it is limited to the context being studied. This substantive theory and theoretical model can be utilized by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) to address this issue and prevent it from becoming more widespread.

Based on the study's findings, the researcher sees this model as related to existing theories, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, introduced by Abraham Maslow (1943), a humanistic psychologist, initially comprised five primary needs that must be met by individuals: physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. However, three additional needs have been added over time: the need for knowledge and understanding, which is now at the fifth level; aesthetic needs, at the sixth level; and transcendence needs, at the eighth level. Generally, this theory explains that individuals require these needs to navigate their daily lives.

In this context, the researcher believes that parental encouragement and support are crucial and correspond to the third level of Maslow's theory, which is love and belonging. According to Maslow, this need for love is essential for fostering close relationships between parents and children. Guided by Maslow's theory, an individual must first meet their physiological needs, such as food and drink, as insufficient nourishment can impair classroom learning (Nor Nazimi, Jaffary & Aminudin, 2017). Once physiological needs are met, safety and protection are required to avoid problems. Parental sensitivity and concern for their children's safety can enhance their motivation and confidence, particularly in continuing their studies. Consequently, this creates a higher sense of self-worth (Neff, 2003a; 2008; Nor Junainah & Ab. Aziz, 2009).

Moreover, the love provided is a key factor and a motivational boost for these youths to continue their university education. Every individual needs love from parents, guardians, or peers to explore

and recognize their potential. The application of Maslow's Theory can significantly increase adolescents' self-awareness, showing that love has a positive impact on their decision to pursue higher education (Neff, 2003a, 2003b, 2008). Indirectly, this ensures a smooth, effective, and harmonious decision-making process regarding further education.

Furthermore, some study participants mentioned that they were given the opportunity to choose fields and courses of interest and received family support. This is crucial for ensuring that these individuals continue their education at universities without pressure. At the same time, these youths have employed strategies to gather essential information about their chosen fields, courses, and universities. This approach opens opportunities for them to research and investigate their desired educational paths, providing an advantage in understanding the background, benefits, and job prospects based on industry demands. Thus, SPM school leavers need to fulfill all the requirements outlined in Maslow's Theory to achieve self-actualization. Therefore, various efforts are necessary to ensure they have all the needed requirements. This will prevent a shortage of skilled and expert labor in the future.

In addition to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the researcher has related the study findings to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, introduced by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1917. This theory emphasizes the influence of the environment on individual development. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979) states that child development is the result of interactions between the child and their environment. There are five interconnected levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

At the microsystem level, this involves the immediate environment where the child interacts directly with close individuals such as parents and family members. At this level, parents are the most important socialization agents in a child's life. Children require positive social interactions for their development.

The researcher argues that parental support and encouragement are primary factors influencing SPM school leavers' decisions. This is because if there are issues in this cycle, problems will also arise in the process. For example, these youths might make unexpected decisions due to different environmental influences.

Additionally, the mesosystem level involves interactions between different microsystems. Any events occurring within one microsystem will affect interactions with other microsystems. For instance, an employee who feels marginalized by the company may face difficulties in maintaining a good relationship with their employer.

Based on the findings, the researcher believes that the transition from school to university learning is closely related to lecturers' behaviors. At school, students are provided with materials for teaching and learning easily, whereas in university, lecturers only give instructions for assignments. This can be linked to Neff (2008), Nor Junainah and Ab. Aziz (2009), where behaviors are closely related to environmental relationships. Thus, new university students need to adapt quickly to the teaching and learning patterns there to ensure the country produces competitive human resources that can stand out internationally.

Furthermore, the exosystem level involves experiences with environments that do not directly involve the individual but where decisions affect others. In other words, an individual's experiences will influence the decisions of others.

According to this theory, the researcher has linked it to the findings

where SPM school leavers are highly influenced by social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and X. These youths are exposed to difficulties in finding employment after graduation. Recently, some have even claimed that SPM lacks value and importance in their lives. Such statements contribute to a lack of interest in pursuing university education. Some teachers have queried their students' plans after completing SPM, with surprising feedback as some proudly declare they will start working. Videos posted on social media have received various reactions from the public. Some support the decision due to pressing economic needs requiring financial resources, while others oppose it, arguing that it encourages youths to continue working.

The macrosystem level involves changes over time. Based on the findings, the researcher connects this theory with changes in educational and living environments. This occurs when youths who continue their education at universities are separated from their families, resulting in significant cultural changes. This is a primary reason some youths do not continue their university education. Additionally, parental support, which sees education as less important due to various factors, affects their children. Issues such as cultural differences and the presence of higher education institutions in residential areas, where parents observe free interactions between males and females leading to issues such as out-of-wedlock pregnancies, influence parents to prevent their children from pursuing university education. Parents do not want their children to bring shame upon them.

Finally, the chronosystem level involves environments that change over time. According to this theory, it relates to the strategies employed by SPM school leavers in continuing their education at universities. These strategies include seeking support from parents, obtaining educational loans, and preparing by gathering information from the internet or surrounding people about fields and universities. This contrasts with past practices where youths relied solely on information from teachers and government programs conducted in schools.

CONCLUSION

Charmaz introduced the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) method, which is a component of grounded theory research methodology. This study was conducted to explore how the constructivist grounded theory method can aid in researching adolescents' attitudes toward post-secondary education. The study employed a qualitative approach using CGT and included semi-structured interviews to gather information from participants for the development of substantive theory. Initial coding and focused coding methods were used to analyze the study data. The researcher also utilized ATLAS.ti software to detail, integrate, eliminate, and organize initial codes. Adolescents themselves were central to all strategies and actions implemented. Four main themes were identified: perspective, attitude, strategy, and outcome, which helped in constructing a substantive theory based on these themes. In conclusion, the use of CGT in research is still relatively new and has seen limited adoption in Malaysia. It is hoped that this writing will assist other researchers in gaining a deeper understanding of this research method.

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