

BEYOND THE SURFACE: ENHANCING QUALITATIVE INQUIRY THROUGH DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Sathaananthan, T.

Department of Medical Education and Research, Faculty of Health-Care Sciences, Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

Received 15 December 2025
Accepted 23 December 2025

Correspondence to:
Sathaananthan, T.
sathaananthan@esn.ac.lk

Keywords:
Discourse Analysis;
Qualitative Research;
Healthcare Education;
Cultural Responsiveness;
Power and Identity.

Dear Editor,

Qualitative research plays a crucial role in advancing understanding of complex social, cultural, and institutional phenomena, particularly within higher education and health-care contexts. Among qualitative approaches, discourse analysis offers a powerful and rigorous means of examining how language functions not only as a vehicle for communication but also as a social practice through which meaning, power, and identity are constructed and negotiated.

The value of discourse analysis lies in its capacity as a methodological framework to move beyond surface-level interpretations of texts. By attending carefully to spoken and written language, discourse analysis enables researchers to reveal implicit assumptions, normative expectations, and hierarchical structures that shape everyday institutional practices. Such insights are especially significant when studying processes such as formative feedback, professional socialisation, and decision-making, where communication is central and power relations are often subtle yet influential.

In culturally and institutionally complex settings, including health-care education in South Asian contexts, the application of discourse analysis is particularly pertinent. Communication practices in these environments are shaped by deeply rooted traditions, professional hierarchies, and collective values. Discourse analysis allows these contextual features to be examined with sensitivity and analytical precision, ensuring that interpretations remain grounded in participants' lived realities rather than imposed theoretical abstractions. In doing so, it supports the development of educational practices that are both contextually relevant and culturally responsive.

Research studies demonstrate the methodological strength gained by integrating discourse analysis with grounded theory principles. While grounded theory facilitates the inductive development of concepts from data, discourse analysis sharpens attention to how those concepts are linguistically produced and socially sustained. The combination enhances

analytical rigour, reflexivity, and transparency, enabling the generation of theory that is empirically grounded and socially meaningful.

As an editorial reflection, this contribution reinforces the importance of methodological reflexivity and theoretical clarity in qualitative inquiry. Discourse analysis requires careful engagement with data, acknowledgement of the researcher's interpretive role, and sensitivity to context. However, when applied systematically, it offers unparalleled insight into the dynamics of language, power, and culture within institutions.

Through this journal, I encourage researchers to consider discourse analysis as a robust and ethically grounded approach for qualitative research, particularly in studies seeking to inform practice and policy. By foregrounding language as a site of inquiry, discourse analysis not only deepens scholarly understanding but also contributes to the co-construction of educational and organisational practices that are inclusive, culturally attuned, and responsive to stakeholder voices.

References

Imafuku, R., Saiki, T., & Woodward-Kron, R. (2022). Revisiting discourse analysis in medical education research. *International Journal of Medical Education*, 13, 138–142. <https://doi.org/10.5116/ijme.6278.c1b7>

Mohammadi, S., Yazdannik, A., & Yousefy, A. (2017). Discourse analysis: A useful methodology for health-care system researches. *Journal of Education and Health Promotion*, 6(1), 111. https://doi.org/10.4103/jehp.jehp_124_15

Woodward-Kron, R. (2020). Let's talk about discourse analysis for health professional education: What, why and how. *Focus on Health Professional Education: A Multi-Professional Journal*, 21(2), 63–74. <https://doi.org/10.11157/fohpe.v21i2.470>