

**PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT:
A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF PAKISTANI
FEMALE DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN
MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

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MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

by

SYED FAISAL HYDER SHAH

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This thesis is dedicated to...
My beloved Wife Fasiha
Son Abbas and Daughter Eshaal

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GT	Grounded Theory
HEC	Higher Education Commission of Pakistan
HEPA	Hal Ehwal Pembangunan
HOD	Head of Department
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IIUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PSS	Pakistani Students Societies
SI	Symbolic Interactionism
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UK	United Kingdom
UM	University of Malaya
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Organisation
US	United States
USM	Universiti Sians Malaysia
UUM	Universiti Utara Malaysia

LALUAN KE ARAH PEMERKASAAN: KAJIAN *GROUNDED TEORI*
PELAJAR DOKTOR FALSAFAH WANITA PAKISTAN DI UNIVERSITI
AWAM MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Di Pakistan, kaum wanita mempunyai peluang yang kurang untuk mendapat pendidikan peringkat tinggi berbanding kaum lelaki. Hanya segolongan kecil wanita mempunyai peluang untuk mendapatkan pendidikan tinggi di luar negara. Terdapat banyak halangan struktur dan sosio-budaya yang menghalang wanita Pakistan untuk melanjutkan pengajian ke peringkat pendidikan tinggi. Walau bagaimanapun, disebabkan oleh kepentingan pendidikan tinggi yang semakin meningkat, beberapa orang wanita berusaha dan berjaya memanfaatkan peluang pendidikan di luar negara walaupun mereka terpaksa menghadapi pelbagai cabaran. Justeru, kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka cabaran yang dihadapi oleh para pelajar wanita Pakistan semasa menjalani pendidikan kedoktoran mereka di universiti terpilih di Malaysia. Selain itu, kajian ini turut meneroka strategi mereka untuk mengatasi cabaran tersebut serta mengapa mereka memilih Malaysia sebagai destinasi pendidikan tinggi. Untuk mencapai matlamat ini, temu bual separa berstruktur dengan 30 orang pelajar doktor falsafah wanita Pakistan dipilih secara persampelan bertujuan dari empat buah universiti awam di Malaysia. Data telah dianalisis menggunakan perisian NVivo (11 pro) menggunakan metodologi dan prosedur Grounded Theory, iaitu, pengekodan terbuka (open coding), pengekodan paksi (axial coding), dan pengekodan selektif (selective coding). Empat tema utama telah muncul daripada data iaitu akademik, sosial, peribadi, dan Malaysia. Empat tema ini merungkai pengalaman responden dan mekanisme daya tindak yang mereka gunakan semasa pengajian kedoktoran mereka sehingga ke masa temu bual dijalankan. Kajian ini telah membangunkan *Teori Laluan*

Ke Arah Pemerksaan substantif yang mengambil konteks pendidikan Pakistan dan Malaysia sebagai satu kes kajian. Teori yang muncul ini memberikan dimensi baru dalam pengetahuan kerja sosial, terutamanya cara pelajar kedoktoran wanita Pakistan ini mengurus dan mengubah personaliti mereka di negara yang berbeza ketika menjalani cabaran psikososial akulturasi dan cabaran akademik. Teori yang muncul ini turut menggambarkan konsep kerja sosial tentang strategi pemerksaan diri dan ketahanan diri, di mana pengetahuan sedemikian dapat digunakan oleh para pengamal dalam intervensi mereka kepada golongan yang kurang berdaya, termasuklah pelajar antarabangsa.

**PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF
PAKISTANI FEMALE DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC
UNIVERSITIES**

ABSTRACT

In Pakistan, women have fewer opportunities for higher education than men. Additionally, a few women have a chance to avail foreign higher education. There are number of structural and socio-cultural barriers that impede women's access to higher education. However, due to unprecedented importance of higher education, a few women strive and succeed to avail educational opportunities abroad where they also come across myriad challenges. To this end, the present study primarily aims to explore the challenges that Pakistani female students experience while pursuing their doctoral education in the selected universities of Malaysia. Moreover, this study explores their coping strategies to overcome such challenges as well as the reasons why these students choose Malaysia as their higher education destination. To achieve these objectives, the present study conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 Pakistani female doctoral students who were purposively selected from the four public universities in Malaysia. The data was analyzed in NVivo (11 pro) using Grounded Theory methodology and procedures i.e., Open, Axial, and Selective coding on all transcribed interviews. Four main themes emerged from the data, i.e., academic, social, personal, and Malaysia. These four themes captured respondents' experiences and coping mechanism adopted during their doctoral journey till the time of the interviews. This study has developed a substantive *Theory of Pathways to Empowerment* taking Pakistan and Malaysian educational contexts as a case in point. The emerged theory provides a new dimension to knowledge in social work particularly the way these Pakistani female doctoral students manage and transform their personalities in a

different country while undergoing psychosocial challenges of acculturation and academic challenges. As the emerged theory also illustrates social work concepts of self-empowerment and resilience strategies, such knowledge can be used by practitioners to incorporate it into their interventions to vulnerable groups, including international students.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed description of background and significance of the research study. The chapter starts with a brief profile of the situation of higher education in Pakistan. In addition, the chapter also presents the problem statement, research questions, research objectives, significance of the study, role of the researcher, scope of study, context of social work, and concludes with the chapter summary.

1.2 Background

Women's enrollment in higher education in Pakistan is relatively lower as compare to men. As stated by Malik and Courtney (2012) there are very few women who continue their higher education, among those, the number of women who pursue higher education abroad, is even far too less. There are a number of barriers, influencing girl's access to the higher education (Khalid & Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2002). Despite of several policy efforts there are still multiple factors related to family, culture, community resulting in low participation of girls in education.

Human development of Pakistan is hampered mainly because of its poor education system. According to Kazmi (2005) inadequate physical infrastructure, lack of facilities, lack of qualified teachers, outdated curricula, poor governance and transparency and limitation of funds for education are the key reasons contributing towards poor education system in Pakistan. Hoodbhoy (2014) further highlighted that

the situation of higher education is worse than ever because of the current policies that reward authors and PhD supervisors with cash incentives and promotions. The author explained that universities in Pakistan have failed to establish the mechanism to trace the academic crimes that encourages production of junk papers and poor-quality researchers. The author claimed that “Academic crime” progressing in Pakistani universities due to lack of punishment. It was further said that educational system in Pakistan has been shaped by deeply conservative social and cultural values that discourage questioning and stresses obedience. The author further suggests that progress in the society demands to treat education and cultural taboos separately (p. 592).

Education is among the basic needs for every society, and the development of a country largely depends on the quality of its higher education (Haider, 2008). Quality higher education and better education system, enhances the potential of socioeconomic and cultural development and enhance the scientific and technological advancements of the country (Haider,2008; Batool, Sajid & Shaheen, 2013).

According to the research finding by Khalid and Khan, (2006) education for women remains a perplexing issue and women are still in the quagmire of social, political, economic and cultural spheres. The authors further explained that, there are a number of problems related to women education such as, limited availability of infrastructure, lack of mobility, security and inappropriate environment for women to flourish in education. A brief review of higher education in Pakistan shows that major reforms were brought in during the government of General Pervez Musharraf in the year 2000 (Tariq & Bussry, 2012). It was also documented that the participation of women in higher education in Pakistan has brought many benefits to women by

equipping them with knowledge and skills resulting in the basis of their economic independence (Malik & Courtney 2012).

Mamoon, (2005) in his research on higher education reforms in developing countries showed that, those developing countries which have invested more on higher education are yielding the results of their investments. The author concluded that, higher education has contributed a great deal in the growth and economic development of developing countries. However, as a developing country Pakistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) percentage on education is the least among other developing countries of South Asia. The comparison of public sector spending's by South Asian countries is presented in the following table;

Table 1.1: Comparison of public sector spending

Country	Public Sector Spending (As % of GDP)	Literacy Rates In (%)
Bangladesh	2.4	59.8
Bhutan	4.8	52.0
India	3.1	73.8
Iran	4.7	85.0
Maldives	11.2	99.0
Nepal	4.6	66.0
Pakistan	2.0	60.0
Sri Lanka	2.6	91.2

Source: Pakistan Economic Survey 2013-14

Limitation of budget, poor research environment, and inconsistency of policies are among the leading challenges, to higher education in Pakistan (Fazal, 2011). A recent change in the trend suggest that despite all Socio-cultural barriers, a growing proportion of female students are getting education in the tertiary level, and in some cases girls even outnumbered boys at higher education level (Sadia, 2014). Although

the number is increasing gradually but the quality of education is still a matter of concern for many aspiring students in Pakistan. The demand for quality higher education has forced many aspiring students to seek education opportunities abroad (Murtaza, 2012).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The global Gender Gap Index report of 2016, published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), Pakistan stood at 143rd out of 144 countries. This data shows the gloomy picture of Pakistan and its gender biased policies. Further research evidence also suggests that female students in Pakistan face various difficulties to reach at higher level of education (Malik & Courtney, 2011; Batool et al., 2013). These observations confirm the need for the present research study.

Conservative societies, such as Pakistan, women hardly can access same opportunities as men, due to several deeply-rooted discriminatory socio-cultural values and traditions (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). They further stated that there is considerable diversity in the status of women across the classes, “geographical regions, ethnic origin and the rural/urban divide due to uneven socioeconomic development and the impact of tribal, feudal, and capitalist social formations place on women’s lives” (p .4). Similarly, Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) documented the condition of south Asian women (that includes Pakistan) that women are mostly excluded from family decision making and have limited access and control over resources. In addition, women’s freedom of movement is severely constrained and Pakistan is not an isolated case from this observation.

In Pakistan many students fail to complete the preliminary stages of education due to several socio, cultural, economic and political reasons (see Murtaza, 2012). It is also evident that inequalities across education are widespread. Especially cultural attitudes towards girl's education are strongly biased and rigid. Various programs to promote female education have been announced but unable to translate words into action due to the several political, social and cultural obstacles. Thus, the educational status of women in Pakistan remained low and is in fact amongst the lowest in the world. Women in Pakistan do not form a homogeneous group, and their opportunities for education differ significantly, depending on the social system they belong from (Jayaweera, 1997; Murtaza, 2012).

Pakistani women's inability to travel alone, where they want and when they wish, is viewed as an important social barrier to access education in general and higher education in particular (Mumtaz & Salway, 2005). The authors further described that the practice of *pardah* in Pakistani society is another dimension to study. Noreen and Khalid (2012) elaborated that gender roles were worked out based on convenience. The community leaders hardly thought about the complex conditions that caused subjugation and oppression among Pakistani women. Some of the traditions, values and customs have enslaved women and restricted them to house. In addition, the existing stereotypes regarding women's higher education in Pakistan further violated the right to education for women. Many of the conservative families are of the view that higher education brings moral deprivation, and grant unrestricted freedom to women causing delay and disadvantage in their marriages (Behlol, Najeebullah, & Irfan, 2016).

The patriarchal structures in rural areas often combine with poverty to limit educational opportunities for girls. The study findings of Farah and Bacchus (1999)

relate to the prevailing cultural conditions of a patriarchal society and norms of society which act as barriers to change. In addition, the study results have shown positive signs of participation of women in higher education. The authors have concluded that to narrow the gender gap, the government of Pakistan should develop and implement educational policies for women and special attention should be paid on the motivation and encouragement of women to participate in higher education (Farah & Bacchus, 1999).

The religious extremists *Mullaism* is also against women's education, many a times they issue *Fatwas* (decrees) to disallow and restrict women from getting education. Growing intolerance and religious extremism is also one of the reasons of lower enrolment of girls in schools (Noreen & Khalid, 2012). The destruction of schools and killings has harmed women's education in Pakistan. The damage was related to *Taliban's* (a terrorist group) opposition to girl's education as bombing of girls' schools were among *Taliban* policies (Wieseltier, 2012). One of the leading newspaper of Pakistan DAWN reported that over 600,000 children of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (north-western province of Pakistan) were out of schools (DAWN, 2012). The newspaper also reported that 710 schools were destroyed by militants. Education activist, blogger and Nobel Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai was also among the victims and was shot in the head and neck by *Taliban* insurgents in 2012.

Among the many reasons explained above, it was the poverty; deep- patriarchal structures, religious extremism, mobility issues and stereotypical mindset on higher education can be reported as the main reasons that are disempowering Pakistani Women. The fact that there are only 2.5% of female students enrolled at tertiary level education, which is way below than their male counterparts (Batool et al., 2013).

Malik and Courtney (2011) in their study on *effects of participation in higher education on women's empowerment in Pakistan* have found that participation in higher education have enabled women to impact on several discriminatory practices and women have realised their lower position in the society and few have strived for a social change. They also noted the discrimination existed within the family regarding provision for educational opportunities should be addressed by introducing structural social work tools. The fact that giving preference to Son is a phenomenon that is deeply rooted in the patriarchal systems also needs to be addressed. In addition to all these structural issues the, prevailing cultural norms and practices continue to stop successful introduction of social change in the wider Pakistani society putting women at a more vulnerable position.

Yeh and Inose (2003) in their quantitative study of 372 international undergraduate students from 77 countries in an urban University of northeastern part of USA, have found that international students experience many challenges as a result of language and cultural barriers, academic and financial difficulties, interpersonal problems, racial discrimination, loss of social support, alienation and homesickness. Altbach and Teichler (2001) stated that foreign students are potentially vulnerable to exploitation financially or through poor-quality programs (p. 21) and Pakistani female doctoral students admitted in to Malaysian public universities are not an exception. To sum up the research problem under investigation, the present study aimed to examine the meaning that Pakistani female doctoral students attach to their study abroad experience. The present study, using Grounded Theory documented the psycho social challenges in terms of adjustment and coping to be able to complete their higher studies successfully.

Published literature on Pakistani international students is scarce and there is a huge need for further studies in this area which can be used to advocate by social workers to increase female students' access to higher education and gender sensitive policies. Present research study fills this gap in the social work scholarship on access to education in general and Pakistani international students and their challenges and coping strategies so that better policies can be formulated and implemented resulting empowerment of Pakistani women.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The present study of Pakistani female doctoral students in Malaysian public universities is significant in the number of ways which are given below:

Scientific Significance: The study focused on the international female students from Pakistan. There was no evidence available showing studies conducted on the subject to address the process and experiences of Pakistani female international students. Thus, scarcity of literature, particularly on Pakistani female international students warranted for further exploration of the subject, given the fact that number of Pakistani students are thriving to study in Malaysia.

Methodological Significance: The present study was conducted using the Strassarian Grounded Theory methodology approach which was also a rarity in the field of Social Work in South Asia. Research methodology is one of the rare common points of focus across various branches of science. Science advances via carrying out new research, while the knowledge produced is used for the good of human beings. Thus, Social work research especially deals with problems experienced by the

vulnerable segments with existing and advance research methodologies to come up with the more practical solutions.

Professional Significance: Grounded Theory methodology is a theory building approach where theory emerges from the data of the research; it will be an innovation in the field of social work. The emerging theory will contribute to the knowledge of social workers especially in the area of psycho-social counselling of the aspiring and new comer international students which may help them in coping and adjustment in the destination country. It is highly important and need of the hour that social work practice in Pakistan is guided by scientific research and the resultant practices introduced to the literature. The social work profession is a diverse and vast profession whose mission is to improve outcomes and the quality of life for vulnerable populations (in this case international students) in host country.

Geographical significance: Pakistan is divided in four provinces namely Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Apart from these four there are federally administrated tribal areas (FATA) which is a semi-autonomous tribal region in northwestern Pakistan, it consists of seven tribal agencies (districts) and six frontier regions. This description shows the complexity and diversity of the country. There are 163 universities in Pakistan both public and private. The access to higher education is limited to women due to various reasons. The areas such as FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan are very much conservative, where the access of women in higher education domains is low. The published literature on women's access to higher education is scarce. The literature on overall international students also suggest that very less is published on Pakistani international students. In this context present study contributes to the access to higher education for women in Pakistan. This study

specially contributes to the home and host country experiences of international female students from Pakistan in Malaysia.

1.5 Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to understand the process of Pakistani female doctoral students as experienced by them. In addition, this research explores the meaning they meaning they give to their experiences. The main question of the study was:

What problems and challenges do Pakistani female doctoral students experience in their process of doctoral education in selected Malaysian public universities and how do they cope up with these challenges and what meaning do they give to the process?

In addressing the above question, several sub questions were also addressed including:

- What are the challenges faced by Pakistani female students to be an international student in Malaysia?
- How do they cope up with their challenges?
- Why Pakistani female students have chosen Malaysia as their destination for higher education?

1.6 The Objectives

The main objective of the present study was to interpret the experiences, perceptions, and descriptions of Pakistani female students. *To investigate the challenges and experiences of Pakistani female international students studying in selected Malaysian Public Universities.* These objectives were further explored as they imply theoretical

sampling in chapter four. The present study has been conducted using grounded theory which primarily aims at building a theory. Hence the present study also developed a substantive theory.

1. To investigate the challenges of Pakistani female doctoral students in Malaysian public universities.
2. To explore the coping strategies adopted by the Pakistani female doctoral students.
3. To analyze the reasons for selecting Malaysia as a higher education destination.
4. To develop a substantive theory from the data of the present study.

1.7 Researcher's Role

According to Creswell (2014) the role of a researcher has an immense importance in the field of qualitative research as the qualitative research is an interpretive research where it is obvious that the researcher has to involve and sustain intense experiences with the participant. Qualitative research introduces a range of strategic, ethical and personal issues (Locke et al., 2013). The researcher role is to present the point of view of social actor's, for that researcher may have to become immersed in that way of life to grasp the meanings (Blaikie, 2010). The researcher plays a facilitator role in which the researcher enables the participant to share their thoughts, feelings, emotions and experiences freely, without introducing any bias (Ritchie et al., 2013). It was further, stressed that, the role is not a passive, in which researcher sits back and listens, but the role of the researcher is active which guides the interview process, ensuring all the relevant areas are covered according to the subject and also to make sure that the interview covers the entire depth.

Managing the interview process involves ensuring coverage of the agenda to be discussed within the interview, steering the interviewee back to the topics from which they stray. It means exercising judgment about the length of time that should be devoted to any given topic and when to move on to the next one, and about how to respond if the interviewee moves on to unanticipated topics. The researcher should decide what questions are supposed to be asked and how they are phrased, and how to follow up until a satisfactory answer has been obtained (Ritchie et al., 2013, pp. 147). Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated that, the researcher should have the firm insight about the subject and should possess the capacity to understand the respondent's views and have ability to give meaning to the data.

In view of the above guidelines discussed by the authors, the researcher in the present study was adhered to the methodological principles of grounded theory in terms of data collection and analysis.

1.8 Scope of Study

Given the multi-dimensional nature of women empowerment and access to higher education abroad as discussed in the above section, the scope of the present study was restricted to explore the process of higher education and personal experiences of Pakistani female doctoral students in selected Malaysian public universities, taking the research objectives in to consideration.

The scope of the current study is limited to explore the psycho, social, cultural and economic challenges that the selected Pakistani female doctoral students have experienced in Malaysian public universities alone. Private higher education institutions are not included in this study. The grounded nature of the study allowed

developing a theory of pathways to women empowerment in the context of Pakistan as sending country and Malaysia as a destination country for international higher education.

Keeping in view of the limited number of Pakistani female doctoral students enrolled in Malaysian universities, the researcher decided to contact and seek consent from maximum number of participants to be included in this study. The information regarding Pakistani female doctoral students studying in Malaysian public universities was gathered from the Pakistani student's communities of seven main universities of Peninsular Malaysia. Out of which four universities i.e. Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), University of Malaya (UM) and International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) were selected.

1.9 Social Work and Present Study

The present study is an in-depth investigation of the processes and challenges of Pakistani female doctoral students. The study captures in detail the process of internationalization, incorporates severe challenges of adjustment to many issues ranging from psychological to socio-cultural. The profession and philosophy of social work strives and work for the vulnerable segments of the society. This study assumes that female international students are/ could become vulnerable to many factors in a country of their studies. Placing this study within the context of social work has used the social work concepts of self-empowerment and access to services.

One of the other aspect of present research is the application of Grounded Theory in the field of social work. Grounded theory has a great potential for social work because in order to conduct theory-based practice, social workers need middle-

range theories that are neither highly abstract nor difficult to apply in real life (Okta, 2012). Both Social work and Grounded Theory focus on the interaction of individual and society. This study being focused on the Pakistani female students and their interactions with Malaysian culture, society and higher educational environment will be greatly benefited by using grounded theory. Using grounded theory, this research study aims to provide or build a social work theory in the arena of women, higher education and empowerment, by exploring how female students as individuals navigate their experiences and, ultimately achieve their educational goals. This study has contributed to the body of social work knowledge that is currently scarce on Pakistani female doctoral students and their higher education issues.

1.10 Chapter Outline

The study deliberately privileges the voice of participants with the aim of exploring in detail their experiences as an international student. Following the 1st introductory chapter, the study is presented in four more chapters:

Chapter 2

The literature review chapter will provide a detailed review of existing empirical studies exploring international student's experiences. The chapter will also provide the debate over the place of literature review in the grounded theory.

Chapter 3

The chapter is divided in two folds, (I) Methodology (II) Methods and Data Collection and analysis. At first section, the chapter focuses on the methodological approach employed that provides the detailed information on relevant methodological concerns relating to the study and later discusses the philosophical base of the present

study. The second section deals with the methods used in the present study in detail. The third part presents the data collection and analysis process.

Chapter 4

The chapter presents data analysis in detail with the emerged themes and the voices of Pakistani female doctoral students. The emerged themes are the main section headings of this chapter.

Chapter 5

The chapter presents discussion, implications, recommendations and conclusion. The chapter further includes, relationship among categories, theoretical framework, emerged theory of *Pathways to Empowerment* and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is two-fold; first is to provide a discussion that covers the debate over the place of literature review in grounded theory approach. Secondly it provides a review of existing literature on international students and their facets of challenges and motivations in general and in the context of Pakistani students specifically.

The present study investigates the challenges, motivations and experiences of Pakistani female doctoral students in the process of higher education in selected Malaysian public universities. The study was conducted by using the systematic grounded theory method of Strauss and Corbin (1990;1998).

A chapter on literature review has significance in all most all research approaches and fields, and considered as the backbone of any research including social work research. It is however important to know some research practices about the method which are used in this study using grounded theory. This method holds a unique approach to the field of study, as the grounded theory starts with ‘no preconceived notions’ or theory. The research emerges without any theoretical foundation or framework in the beginning, rather the theory emerges from the data collected at different stages during the study. Thus, it is essential to mention here some of the rules, restrictions and stances debated regarding the ‘place of literature review’ in the research studies that are guided by the Grounded Theory.

The debate over the place of literature review is included in the first section of this chapter with an objective to enhance the understanding of the readers about how,

when, where and how much and of which areas of the study, the data can be reviewed in using grounded theory as an approach. This chapter also provides overview of methods of using Grounded Theory and its concepts from specific perspective of social work research and knowledge building. The author also tries to sketch a brief analysis of how grounded theory gets affected by a variety of recent developments in social work research.

2.2 Place of Literature Review in Grounded Theory

The self-defined purpose of grounded theory is to develop theory about phenomena of interest. It is not just abstract theorizing, instead the *theory* needs to be *grounded* or rooted in observation, hence the term grounded theory is a complex *iterative* process. The research begins with the raising of *generative questions* which help to guide the research but are not intended to be either static or confining. As the researcher begins to gather data, *core theoretical concepts* are identified. Tentative *linkages* are developed between the theoretical core concepts and the data. This early phase of the research tends to be open and can potentially take months. Later on, the researcher is more engaged in verification and summary. The effort tends to evolve toward one *core category* that is central. Hence, the general practice is that the researcher starts with a shallow literature review about the phenomena of interest.

The place of literature review in the grounded theory has always been a matter of debate for researchers that on which stage the secondary data can be used. As Bricks and Mills (2011) thought that the literature review in grounded theory keeps going with the research but remained misunderstood. The authors further elaborated that the literature review keeps going along with the process differs from the conventional way

of doing literature review at the beginning is due to prevent research from making up theories and thus preventing introduction of bias which can affect the process as well as outcomes.

Birks and Mills (2011) by alerting the potential pitfalls argued that, if literature review is done before data collection in grounded theory. It is potentially possible that the researcher generates leads and restrictions of the available literature may influence the whole study (p. 84). They further stated that gaps may subsequently exist in the theoretical construction that can defy researcher's attempts to generate a cohesive theory. Charmaz (2006) expressing the similar views that the literature review in grounded theory research remains disputed as well as misunderstood.

Reviewing the literature before starting a study is a traditional approach method, however, reviewing a thorough literature or consultation prior to the commencement of the research is problematic especially when grounded theory is being used. However, it is also suggested by one of the grounded theories founder Barney Glaser that; the literature review of related or substantive areas of the study must be avoided. Barney Glaser further suggests that the remaining areas of research which are not that substantive can be read and reviewed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Literature of substantive areas of the study if done in the final stage of sorting and writing-up will add more data for constant comparison and will accomplish and woven the theory (Glaser, 1998).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) have stressed and assured that there is no need to carry out an in-depth review of the literature prior to conducting a study, as the way it is done by the analysts in other research approaches. According to them knowing theories in the areas of their research interest may influence researchers to the extent that they cannot think beyond that already defined theory. Thus, can potentially

jeopardize the whole concept of grounded theory of generated a novel theory and knowledge.

In their view, the researcher should liberate itself from the preconceived notions derived from the data reviewed, and should generate their own abilities to identify and discover what is in the field by their own selves.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) argued that the existing literature of a fixed concept can badly influence the creativity of the researchers and comes up as barrier between the researcher and the potential novel facts of the emerging data, however if the literature is taken as an analytical tool to compare the emerging data it can better help researchers in clearing their conceptualization of novel concepts.

Nathaniel (2006) made a strong point by suggesting that existing concepts can potentially contaminate grounded theory by following mediated beliefs of other findings. Thus, according to Nathaniel, the production of a novel finding needs avoiding contamination of existing beliefs of available literature. However existing literature should support the emerging theory. Nathaniel (2006) further elaborates that once the emerging theory is clarified by the grounded theorist the existing literature is the brilliant way to substantiate and further polishing of the theory. Once the theory is clarified then it becomes a tool to further organize and clarify existing theories and can possibly refute flawed theories by making a clear understanding of the research problem.

Urquhart (2013) stressed that grounded theory is the concept of discovering novel knowledge not merely confirm the existing theory. No one enters into the field as a blank slate “we will all have read something about the phenomena” (p. 7). However, there must be some reading beforehand to make a theory grounded/ Thus, it

is now clear that the researcher going to the field has some background knowledge regarding the substantive areas of the study. This is well explained by Cutcliffe (2000) the researcher cannot be an empty vessel. Given the prior experience and knowledge the grounded theory researcher potentially knows what knowledge is required in the field (Cutcliffe, 2000). Glaser and Strauss (1967) further explained this statement by giving an example of a hospital related study, that the researcher should have been to hospital and bears basic information of the hospital. Thus, the conclusion was made that in these situations literature is not essentially required.

However, Urquhart (2013) stressing the need of PhD students who want to get their proposals accepted and their work to pass the reviewing committee suggested that it has been generally agreed by grounded theorists that a literature search can be done to find out the research question. Nathaniel (2006) further elaborated this point and suggests that, the review should be done in such a method that the present theories should not jeopardize the emerging theory. Further addressing the need of PhD students and the pressure they face from their chairs, committee, or examiners regarding the thorough literature reviews prior the data gathering. The author suggested to conduct an objective literature review to fulfill the requirement of the research proposal. In this study, it was rationalized that the student may take a few months to develop a habit of being objective and not get influenced by the existing theories and concepts.

McCallion (2003) has defended the notion that it is necessary to have some degree of literature review beforehand and presented a view point that the researchers should get enough required knowledge from the existing literature especially methods of integration so that the researcher can well generate a new knowledge.

In addition, Strauss and Corbin (1998) have also suggested that it is useful to have some review of the technical literature to facilitate the initial process of study and supported the suggestion made by other researchers that the literature review can not done enough to generate a research question and helping in managing the data generated from the interviews. Glaser (1998) has also acknowledged the problems of presenting a proposal to dissertation committees and funding agencies and recommends that the researcher should not waste their time and merely follow the directions of others but rather gather literature of both directions may be accurate or inaccurate which can later be modified and proportioned accordingly.

Dunne (2011) by replying how and when existing literature can be used in grounded theory, argued that, it would be very unfortunate as well as unconstructive to sacrifice many of the advantages that can be derived from the early literature review, just because of the idea that the existing knowledge may influence the researcher. There seems an ice breaking between the grounded theorist on this very point and they are concerned that some middle ground must be reached. Dunne, further stated that the position which acknowledges the philosophy of grounded theory and the actual concern related to the influence of the external framework can simultaneously provide a benefit of practical approach. Dunne, also admitted that in her doctoral study on *'grounded theory study of intercultural relations between students in higher education'* she engaged with extensive existing empirical studies, related to her field of study, to know that which issues were central to the field and what gaps were existed, and concluded that, the early review provided a necessary ingredient for further development of her doctoral research work. However, she has not proposed her structure as a template for the other researchers. Though the author suggests that, all researchers should present in their own appropriate way which suits them the best

Charmaz (2006) stressed the need for literature review in some situations such as research grants, projects, and dissertation proposals and also suggested that the literature review should be utilized in a way that it provides stage for the upcoming section or chapters but not allowed to contaminate the new theory.

The literature discussed above presents divergent views of the grounded theorists in different circumstances. What comes out from the discussion is that some theorists have allowed the prior review of literature as per situation to some extent and others have a strong opinion that the review should be carried out in latter stages of the research than in the beginning. Most of the universities and other degree and grant awarding institutes want literature reviews to furnish the proceedings. To cater to the current challenges, both the founders Glaser and Strauss (1967) and many other renowned grounded theorists have shown some flexibility to proceed to grounded theory with some prior literature review, of course with some conditions and precaution measures. Glaser (1998) stated that “do what the people want” (p. 72).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) clearly argued literature review can be done at the beginning to develop a robust research question and steps for the interviews. However, Charmaz (2006) stated that the literature can be used in a way to avoid influence on the creativity of the researcher in developing a new theory. Citing the evidence from the grounded theory, in conducting this research, the researcher has followed a middle path considering the need for a moderate literature review which gives the researchers with an idea and insights of the research problem and phenomenon that he is trying to address in this study.

The extensive review of literature was done after the emergence of themes in chapter four and incorporated in this chapter. The section below presents salient

research work that has been carried out in the areas of international students, higher education, challenges, adjustments, coping and empowerment.

2.3 Higher Education

According to Kramarae and Spencer (2000) higher education embodies the norms of social interaction, such as open debate and argumentative reasons to emphasize the autonomy and self-reliance of its members, further it rejects the discrimination based on social class, gender, ethnicity, race and religion in actual terms higher education is the standard to measure the national system. They further said that higher education is a way of improving individual's lives and for the enrichment of a better society. It allows individuals to enhance their life and raise their minds, offering society with both political and cultural benefits. It encourages the valuable commodities in knowledge of society, the commodities like initiative and independence.

Higher education is recognized as one of the capital investment for social and economic development of any country (Batoool et al., 2013). According to Stephenson (1998) higher education should be judged on following levels; it should give the students the ability and confidence to take their own responsibility for their personal and professional development. It should enable the students to be effective within their circumstances of life and work. It should also promote the pursuit of excellence in development as well as in the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

The review of higher education suggests the importance of higher education in every sphere of the life and considers it as the way of improving individual's lives. The review also linked higher education with the overall growth and development of

the nations. The review also described that higher education gives the individual the ability and confidence, and individuals can enable themselves to work effectively in their circumstances and pursue their excellence.

2.4 International Students

International students are non-citizens in the host country, and are living temporarily in a country other than their own country of citizenship for the purpose of education (UNESCO, 2006). In other words, international students are a group of individuals in an alien land, with a bundle of challenges. These challenges include: adjustments, education, environment, food, culture, loneliness and homesickness. According to Koehne (2005) international students are a diverse group of individuals, who are always spoken in the literature as an entity, rather than individuals with their personal experiences and histories. International students made strong investments in their positioning, apart from their economic sacrifice they had left behind their family, friends and love ones, to achieve their goals. International students on the personal levels develop new outlooks, increase their confidence and self-esteem, and tend to increase their level of maturity as a result of their independent life experiences in another culture (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010).

The reasons for students to pursue their studies abroad include the chance to explore a different culture, learn new ways of thinking and behaving, make new friends, and improve their cross-cultural knowledge and skills (Andrade, 2006). The internationalization of students is driven by the commercial advantages of the international degree and other important related factors such as knowledge acquisition, language skills, and enhancing the curriculum with international content (Altbach &