

Effects of COVID-19 on Autistic University Students

Research Challenge

- To identify the reported effects of the COVID-19 pandemic changes in academic learning formats and social interaction of autistic university students

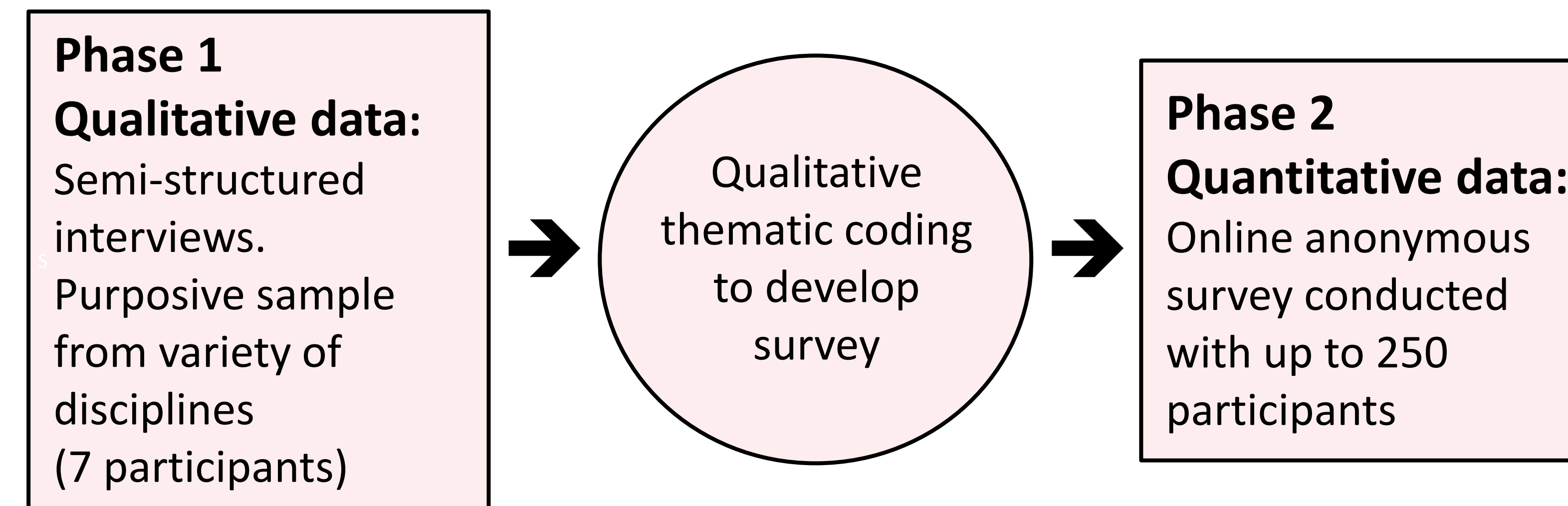
Theoretical framework

- Neurodiversity perspective on autism
- Rhetorical genre studies (e.g., Miller, 1984) to guide interpretation of data
- Double-empathy perspective (Milton, 2012): Both autistic and nonautistic people experience challenges in perspectives of each other

Methodology

- Exploratory, sequential mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2015)
- Community-based participatory research (ASAN, AASPIRE) – “nothing about us, without us”.
- Need for reflexivity of all researchers

Research Design



Early Emerging Themes

- Variety of experiences reported, consistent with understanding that autism is a spectrum
- Many COVID-19 experiences (both positive and negative) are common to both autistic and nonautistic people
- Experiences appear heightened in autistic students
- Some distinctions between undergraduate and graduate students

More specific categories

- **Positive experiences**
 - Opportunities to learn from “hard copy” materials or received input with closed captioning
 - Reduced anxiety and fatigue by not going to campus
 - Less sensory overload and burnout
 - Less need to monitor own behaviour
- **Negative experiences**
 - Technical problems
 - Reduced in-person interactions with profs and friends
 - Need for stronger organizational skills
 - “Invasion” of unknown people into safe spaces

Closed captioning

- Provides a hard copy of information
- Presents information in stronger visual channel (often report strong reading skills)
- Makes information more accessible for many other students (Deaf, EFL, various LDs)
- Requires an analysis of cost-benefits, but potential to make a critical difference in learning opportunities for many students

Next steps

- Complete coding and identify themes
- Develop and administer survey based on findings from semi-structured interviews
- Analyze survey responses
- Integrate and interpret findings of both phases will be from the neurodiversity and Rhetorical Genre Studies perspectives

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