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Qualitative Research in Social Sciences: A Research Profiling Study

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Abstract

The principal objective of this study was to profile qualitative research in social sciences through a comprehensive examination of 10,637 documents. An analysis on how scholars from central/peripheral countries included in the qualitative research citations/publications is presented. Central/peripheral distinction is used to determine the trends in the globalization of qualitative research. With the comprehensive examination, this paper will shed light on the discussion of the patterns of globalization in qualitative research. Science mapping technique among bibliometric methods was employed. This paper is based on studies that published in journals that use the English word/term "qualitative" in their titles. The data for this study encompassed 10,637 documents published between 1995 and 2019 by 16,884 authors. Our findings reveal that qualitative research continue to be mostly North America- and Europe-centered initiatives. A similar situation is also observed for the most cited publications and the affiliated institutes of their authors. The studies focus primarily on the individuals' self and social experiences, social psychology, and their knowledge, attitude, and behaviors in education. The most cited publications and the institutions with the highest number of publications are all North America- and Europe-centered. Another finding is that six of every 10 qualitative research are about medical sciences.

Keywords: Qualitative research community, science mapping, bibliometric analysis, qualitative research field

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Introduction

Qualitative research relies on analyzing and interpreting social experiences and concepts in their own context (Glesne, 1999). Using this approach, researchers and practitioners endeavor to comprehend, describe, interpret, and develop innovative ideas about a context (Creswell, 2009). The realistic nature of qualitative research loads the scholars who conduct qualitative research in diversified societies and cultures across the world with the task of transforming qualitative research into an approach suitable for understanding a particular culture, in addition to the purpose of understanding and interpreting practices pertinent to that culture.

Qualitative research aims to discover and describe how they behave and how they make sense of what they do. It can be said that throughout the history, it has always been searched for this kind of knowledge. "Understanding" and "interpreting" within the framework of a scientific research is a relatively up-to-date attempt. Beginning with the 19th century, the search for scientific knowledge about human and society has notably intensified. In the decades following the long and successful story of science nature and physics, at the end of the 19th century, sociology and anthropology surfaced with the claim of studying societies and cultures by means of scientific methods. Comte aimed to discover the basic laws of society, just the way in physics, by propounding the distinction between social dynamics and social static (Coser, 1971). Just after Comte, Dilthey argued that society and nature could be studied in two different ways. Dilthey's separation of natural sciences and social sciences or humanities can be marked as a new beginning for qualitative research. Dilthey influenced Weber, Simmel, Husserl, and Heidegger by hypothesizing that humanities focus on actions and meanings in everyday life. The initiative that commenced by the end of the 19th century has certain characteristics, namely definition of social sciences, social scientists as observers, research objects, research text, readership, and philosophy (Erickson, 2018).

This departure can also be deemed as the beginning of the period called the Golden Age, according to some authors (Erickson, 2018). The Golden age, which lasted roughly until the 1950s, was effectuated with the "social sciences" initiative, the search for "objective" observations by social scientists just like scientists, with cultures and people as the "objects of research," with research reports independent of the perspectives and contributions of the "researched objects" characterized by presenting these reports not to "research objects," but to a scientific community, and by the scientist worldview whose knowledge and prediction about the process and result is higher and more qualified than the object being researched (Erickson, 2018). This period can be regarded as the period when social sciences were implemented by a positivist philosophy of science.

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) divided this history into particular historical moments and asserted that the development of qualitative research has at least eight different moments. These moments are The Traditional Period (1900–1950), The Modernist and Golden Phases (1950–1970), Blurred Genres

(1970–1980), Paradigm Wars (1980–1985), The Crisis of Representation (1986–1990), The Postmodern Period (1990–1995), Postexperimental inquiry (1995–2000), The Methodologically Contested Present (2000–2004), Increase in Paradigm (2005–2010), The Fractured Posthumanist Period fighting the accountability-oriented business academy (2010–2015), The Uncertain Utopian Future Period in which critical inquiry finds its response in the public space (2016–).

Erickson (2018) asserted that the period that started with the Golden Age has received some criticism in the following periods. The fact that two ethnographers, namely Robert Redfield and Oscar Lewis reached two absolutely different conclusions about the same village (Mexico City, Tepoztlan) 17 years apart, had reinforced the uncertainty concerning the role of the researcher, data, and power relations. Likewise, Father Baldwin, who went to Boyowa after Malinowski, demonstrated that qualitative research cannot be implemented independent of power relations, the role of the researcher, and the research process. It has become more frequently asked whether the researcher is a colonialist, imperialist, an outsider or not. Such denunciations have brought the qualitative research approach closer to its current form. Recently, the debate on whether qualitative research is a global initiative has been added to these criticisms. These condemnations argue against the conceptualization that qualitative research should be a globally managed single-center method, with a single history and a single method.

The Current Scene

Qualitative researchers are no longer a community specific to a particular region of the world. Numerous scholars around the globe search for understanding in a multitude of social science disciplines. It can be argued that qualitative research have become global. However, it remains unclear what is the extent of this globalization and how much do scientific communities, journals, scientific groups, collaborations include international/global scholars.

Scholars from different disciplines and countries (Alasuutari, 2004; Flick, 2014; Chen, 2016; Gobo, 2011; Hsiung, 2012) disagreed with periodizations based on a specific scientific community as Denzin and Lincoln (2018) postulated. For them, it is not possible to delimit and classify qualitative research locally, regionally, or by a single approach. Regarding periodization, Alasuutari (2004, pp.599-600) and Seale et al. (2007) were skeptical and argued that it developed its own narration. Similarly, according to Flick (2014), such a periodization excludes different experiences at a global level. Flick (2014), in this study about interview techniques, hermeneutics, and narrative research in the 1980s, stated that a few original theories and approaches have been developed in Germany that do not rely on the Anglo-American tradition. However, the outcomes of these developments are hardly recognized in the mainstream discussion and literature of qualitative research (Flick, 2014). Chen (2016) stated that qualitative research is not a “Western patented” method, providing the example that

approaches which are the basis of qualitative research such as interpretation and holistic assessment, already exist in traditional Chinese culture and civilization.

Smith (1999), in her study that garnered the attention of various scholars on local cultures, theorized that the research concept has an imperialist and a colonialist implication. Gobo (2011) argued that not just the research, but also the instruments such as interviews, focus group interviews, and questionnaires entail cultural elements, and these are not culture-independent techniques. A similar argument was posited by Weaver (2011) while he was in Russia to conduct an investigation on religious conversion. He cogently stated that the invited people did not participate in the study because they did not trust him and suspected him of being an agent. The studies carried out by Kawaba and Gastaldo (2015) and Flick and Röhnsch (2014) collectively demonstrated beyond any plausible doubt that the view that there is only one form of qualitative research and the assumptions adopted by all should be re-evaluated in the context of local cultures. Furthermore, in response to a question about interaction with local cultures, Hsiung (2012) argued that the development of qualitative methodology persists to be western-centered and, in this respect, countries, and researchers are divided as central and peripheral. Center countries are that have developed research capacities located at Europe (UK, France, Germany) and North America (USA, Canada). Peripheral countries are characterized by their less developed research capacities and located at the rest of the world (China, Russia, Egypt, Argentina) (Hsiung, 2012; Mosbah-Natanson & Gingras, 2014). In addition, she remarked that the qualitative research in the countries called peripheral countries (India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Southern and Eastern Africa, Spain, and South Korea) started in the 1990s. During the same period, translations of Anglo-American methodology studies also began. These translations explain what qualitative research is and what it ought to be. With all the presumptions made by a number of scholars (Smith, 1999; Gobo, 2011; Weaver, 2011; Kawaba & Gastaldo, 2015; Flick & Röhnsch, 2014; Hsiung, 2012), it is a reasonable question qualitative inquiry's global endeavor.

Notwithstanding the fact that Denzin (2014) asserted that qualitative research is always global and already a local method, arguments put forward by Hsiung (2012, 2015) that the same is not yet proven by publications and statistics, keep fresh the questions that qualitative research is a western-centered enterprise today. Hsiung's claims are corroborated by a number of scholars. Instances such as Alasuutari's (2004) claim that Baudrillard felt the need to strategically write in English language and about America, Charmaz's (2014) study on international researchers revealed that a Swedish researcher felt obliged to think in English language, Alasuutari (2004) being warned by the publishing house, indicate that we are addressing an Anglo-Saxon jury. The arguments posited by Smith (1999), Weaver (2011), and Gobo (2011) raise new questions about how much the claim that qualitative research is globalized was recognized. Although their arguments are convincing, a critical shortcoming of the above-mentioned studies is that they are not supported by evidential data. For

instance, Alasuutari (2004) presented his first-hand experiences and singular examples. Moreover, his judgment is largely based on the review of the SAGE publishing house's publication catalog. Likewise, Hsiung (2012, 2015) used singular examples when making attention-grabbing arguments or classifying countries as central and peripheral. Studies conducted by Flick and Röhnsch (2014), Gobo (2011), Weaver (2011), Chen (2011), Kawaba and Gastaldo (2015) did not demonstrate any exception in this regard.

As summarised above, qualitative research become a globally accepted way of research. Paper at hand is unique in terms of problematizing the pattern of globalization trends of qualitative inquiry. By doing that it will be possible to argue the positions of researchers as well as institutions. In this way, the central / peripheral situation of qualitative research in the world has been tried to be critically addressed with the data obtained.

Aim

This paper presents a picture of how scholars from peripheral countries are included in the qualitative publications/citations. To present a more holistic picture, an analysis was also conducted regarding in which disciplines, qualitative research is commonly used and how many studies have been published annually. A total of 10,637 documents by 16,884 authors were analyzed. We intend to demonstrate if qualitative research can prospectively become an extensively used method on a global scale. While doing so, qualitative researchers, publications, and the themes studied heretofore were analyzed in a historical period. The principal objectives of this study were three-fold: (1) to explore the multifaceted perspectives of qualitative research, (2) to embrace non-Western ways of accessing knowledge, and (3) to show how promises to reject a dichotomous and exclusionary approach to science are being recognized.

The ultimate aim of this study was to profile the qualitative research in social sciences through the analysis of 10,637 documents.

The sub-questions are as follows:

1. What are the publication, citation, and network profiles of countries and institutions?

2. What are the citation and network profiles of journals, authors, and publications?

3. What are topic/term profiles?

Method

It is known that when a research field reaches a certain level of maturity, scholars direct their attention to this newly formed literature (Aria et al., 2020). Denzin and Lincoln (2018) emphasized that while qualitative research has reached a certain level of maturity, the distinction between

qualitative/quantitative paradigms is rather getting blurred. In order to present the qualitative research literature, research profiling method was performed Porter et al. (2002, p.352). Porter et al. (2002, 352) stated, "most development pertinent to research profiling falls under the term bibliometrics." At this point, some concepts associated with research profiling and their relationship to this research context should be clarified.

Bibliometric methods are used to analyze physical units of scientific publications and citations (Broadus, 1987). Bibliometry provides both basic and advanced analyses of large volumes of documents and also enables more objective and reliable analyses that rely on data (Diodato & Gellatly, 2013). In addition to the positive aspects of bibliometry, it is useful to keep in mind some of its negatives as limitations, such as (1) it is based on metrics, so it cannot decide what is in good quality, and (2) playing with metrics misdirect the researchers. Scientific mapping is a technique that reveals the structural and dynamic aspects of the rapidly changing scientific information system. A scientific mapping analysis typically comprises data retrieval, pre-processing, network extraction, normalization, mapping, analysis, and visualization stages (Cobo et al., 2011).

In terms of working processes of bibliometric algorithms, concepts such as bibliographic coupling, co-citation coupling, co-word analysis, co-occurrence network should also be expressed. Bibliographic coupling – a single reference element such as title, author, journal number etc. used by two articles is defined as a coupling unit between them (Kessler, 1963). Co-citation coupling is the frequency at which two documents are cited together (Small, 1973). "The intellectual structure can be deduced from the co-citation networks, considering both the bibliographic coupling and the co-citation coupling as alternative criteria for building the relationships" (Aria et al., 2020, p.806). Conceptual structure can be mapped with co-word networks. Basically, co-word analysis is based on the idea that "the co-occurrence of key words describes the contents of the documents in a file" (Callon et al., 1991, p.160).

With the latest advances in text mining and citation analysis tools, a more in-depth and comprehensive analysis is now possible (Van Eck & Waltman, 2017). However, research profiling recommends combining the data obtained from any database by analyzing the same with any tool, rather than tracing some of the basic information. In this way, it is argued that a "knowledge from a body of literature" Porter et al. (2002, p.352) should be produced regarding the whole picture.

Various instruments such as VOSviewer, BibExcel, CiteSpace, and Tableau are used in scientific mapping (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Chen, 2006; Persson et al., 2009). The bibliometrix package software (Aria & Cuccurollu, 2017) developed on R programming language offers comprehensive analysis and visualizations. In this study, the Bibliometrix package software developed on R programming language was used for processing, analysis, and visualization of data. General information about the data, accessing, and sorting methods are explicated below.

Data obtained through science mapping enabled us to perform an in-depth analysis of the current situation. In this regard, in addition to the most frequently studied topics in the qualitative research literature and changes in trending topics over time, a picture of the current situation including the number of publications produced by a given author, institution, and country, citations they received, and collaborations were presented. At first, how data were retrieved, how data were prepared for analysis, and general information about the data depicted in Figure 1.

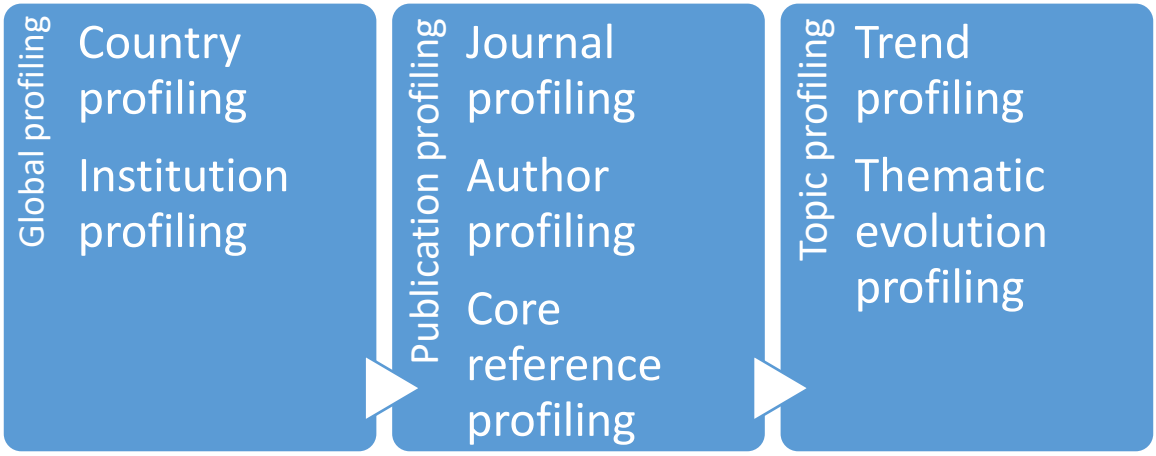

Figure 1. Phases in the Research Profiling and Mapping Process

Data Retrieval and Selection Stages

Phase One:

The aim of this study was to profile the qualitative research in social sciences through the analysis of 10,637 documents. While doing so, the Web of Science (WoS) database was utilized as it includes most studies in social sciences (Falagas et al., 2008). A list of journals that are indexed in the WoS database and in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) was obtained. Subsequent to that, as of May 30, 2020, a list of journals indexed in the SSCI that include the term "qualitative" in their title was obtained on the WoS Master Journal List page. This journal list is enumerated in Table 1.

Table 1. The List of Journals Indexed in The SSCI that Include the Term "Qualitative" in their Title

No.	Journal Name	ISSN/e-ISSN	Subject Categories
1	International Journal of Qualitative Methods	1609-4069	Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary | Sociology and Social sciences | Social Sciences, General
2	International Journal of Qualitative Studies on	1748-2623 /	Social Sciences, General | Public, Environmental and Occupational Health | Nursing | Social Sciences,

	Health and Well-Being	1748-2631		Biomedical | Public Health and Health Care Science
3	Qualitative Health Research	1049-7323 1552-7557	/	Public, Environmental and Occupational Health | Information Science and Library Science | Social Sciences, General | Social Sciences, Biomedical | Social sciences, Interdisciplinary | Public Health and Health Care Science
4	Qualitative Inquiry	1077-8004 1552-7565	/	Social Sciences, General | Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary | Sociology and Social Sciences
5	Qualitative Research	1468-7941 1741-3109	/	Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary | Sociology and Social Sciences | Social Sciences, General | Sociology
6	Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management	1176-6093 1758-7654	/	Management | Business, Finance | Economics and Business
7	Qualitative Research in Psychology	1478-0887 1478-0895	/	Psychiatry/Psychology | Psychology, Multidisciplinary | Psychology
8	Qualitative Social Work	1473-3250 1741-3117	/	Social Work and Social Policy | Social Work | Social Sciences, General
9	Qualitative Sociology	0162-0436 1573-7837	/	Sociology | Sociology and Social Sciences | Social Sciences, General

As seen in Table 1, a total of nine journals were selected on the basis of the predetermined criteria. Each of these journals was accessed through the WoS database, and data including documents were downloaded in a suitable format and prepared for further rigorous examination. It was observed that in addition to social sciences, some of these journals cover multidisciplinary categories such as sociology, psychology, management, and health.

Phase Two:

In accordance with the preferred purpose in the selection of journals, (a) indexing by WoS database, (b) publishing studies on social sciences (c) including the term "Qualitative" in the title were used as exclusion criteria. Subsequent to obtaining the journal list, without limiting any discipline or keyword, records concerning each of these journals were searched, and the acquired results were collected in a "plain text" format. The general information regarding the obtained data set is succinctly presented in Table 2.

Table 2. General Information About the Data Set

Timespan	1995–2019 (24 years)
Documents	10,637
Documents per year	443.20
Authors	16,884
Single-authored documents	3,092
Authors of single-authored documents	3,092

Authors of multi-authored documents	13,792
Author appearances	25,649
Documents per author	0.63
Authors per document	1.59
Co-authors per documents	2.41
Collaboration index	2.23
Citations per document	12.12
Authors' keywords	11,367
Keywords plus	5,553

As evident from Table 2, the timespan of journals was 1995–2019, and 10,637 documents included in the data set produced by 16,884 authors. A majority of the documents (13,792 of 16,884) were multi-authored papers. In the concerned 24-year period, an average of 443.2 publications was produced annually. Each publication received an average of 12.12 citations. Considering this information, it can be said that qualitative researchers typically prefer publishing multi-authored papers, and a very large number of publications are produced in the qualitative research literature with annual 443.2 publications.

It is also important to clarify the counting methods and thresholds.

- Co-word, co-authorship and co-citation analysis were performed according to full-counting method.

- The network parameters – Field: Keyword Plus, Normalization: Association, Nodes: The first 50, Minimum Edges: 2.

- Sankey diagram parameters – Field: Keyword Plus, Number of Words: 250, Weight Index: Inclusion index weighted by word co-occurrences)

Results

Publication, Citation and Network Profiles of Countries and Institutions

Table 3. Top 10 countries With Regard to Publications and Citations

SCR	Country	TP	%	SCR	Country	TC	ACd
1	US	5,263	32.146	1	US	42,322	14.371
2	Canada	4,460	27.241	2	UK	19,468	14.006
3	UK	2,575	15.728	3	Canada	18,467	11.406
4	Australia	1,379	8.422	4	Taiwan	11,588	724.250
5	Sweden	948	5.79	5	Australia	9,020	15.211

6	Norway	546	3.335	6	Denmark	5,851	36.342
7	Denmark	407	2.486	7	Sweden	4,108	10.118
8	New Zealand	313	1.911	8	Norway	2,758	10.901
9	Israel	243	1.484	9	Israel	1,667	14.127
10	South Africa	238	1.453	10	New Zealand	1,457	8.939

SCR = ranking, TP = publications, TC = citations, ACd = average citations per document

A country-based analysis was performed in Table 3 for the number of publications (TP) and citations (TC) in qualitative research. It was found that the country with the highest number of publications is the US (TP = 5,263), followed by Canada (TP = 4,460) and the UK (TP = 2,575). According to Table 6, considering the shares of the top 10 countries in the total number of publications, it can be seen that approximately three-quarters of the publications are produced by these top three countries. Moreover, geographically, the top 10 countries are located in the continents of America, Europe, Africa, and Australia.

It is worth noting that there are conspicuous differences between the lists of top countries with regard to the total number of publications and citations. First, the UK received more citations than Canada and took the second place. With regard to the citations, another critical finding is the position of Taiwan. According to our data set consisting of selected journals, although Taiwan has only 37 publications and had a relatively lower position in terms of publications, it took fourth place in terms of citations. This finding revealed that the large number of citations received by the research paper by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) titled “Three approaches to qualitative content analysis” is effectual for Taiwan’s position in citations. This finding can be explained as data analysis is highly desired in qualitative research.

Table 4. Intra- and Inter-Country Collaborations Among the Top 10 Productive Countries

SCR	Country	Articles	Freq	SCP	MCP	CCR
1	US	2,945	0.336341	2,725	220	7.47
2	Canada	1,619	0.184902	1,466	153	9.45
3	UK	1,390	0.158748	1,266	124	8.92
4	Australia	593	0.067725	505	88	14.84
5	Sweden	406	0.046368	344	62	15.27
6	Norway	253	0.028894	189	64	25.30
7	New Zealand	163	0.018616	143	20	12.27
8	Denmark	161	0.018387	126	35	21.74
9	South Africa	121	0.013819	95	26	21.49
10	Israel	118	0.013476	110	8	6.78

SCR = ranking, SCP = single-country publication, MCP = multiple-country publication, CCR = country collaboration rate, Freq = Frequency

According to the intra- and inter-country collaborations in Table 4, the top three countries with the highest number of publications were the US (2,945), Canada (1,619), and the UK (1,390). These countries were followed by Australia, Sweden, and Norway. Considering the total number of publications produced by the top three countries, it was determined that these countries produced a large number of publications in the qualitative literature compared to the other countries. Moreover, regarding the multiple-country publications (MCPs), the US (220), Canada (153), and the UK (124) secured the first three places in terms of the number of publications. According to the country collaboration rate (CCR) averages, the top countries open to collaboration were determined as Norway (25.30% CCR), Denmark (21.74% CCR), and South Africa (21.49% CCR). Furthermore, our analysis indicated that a few countries such as Israel (6.78% CCR), the US (7.47% CCR), the UK (8.92% CCR), and Canada (9.45% CCR) mostly produce single-country publications (SCPs). In other words, although the US, the UK, and Canada are the top three countries in terms of publications, they produce mostly SCPs. The publication networks of the countries are presented in Figure 2.

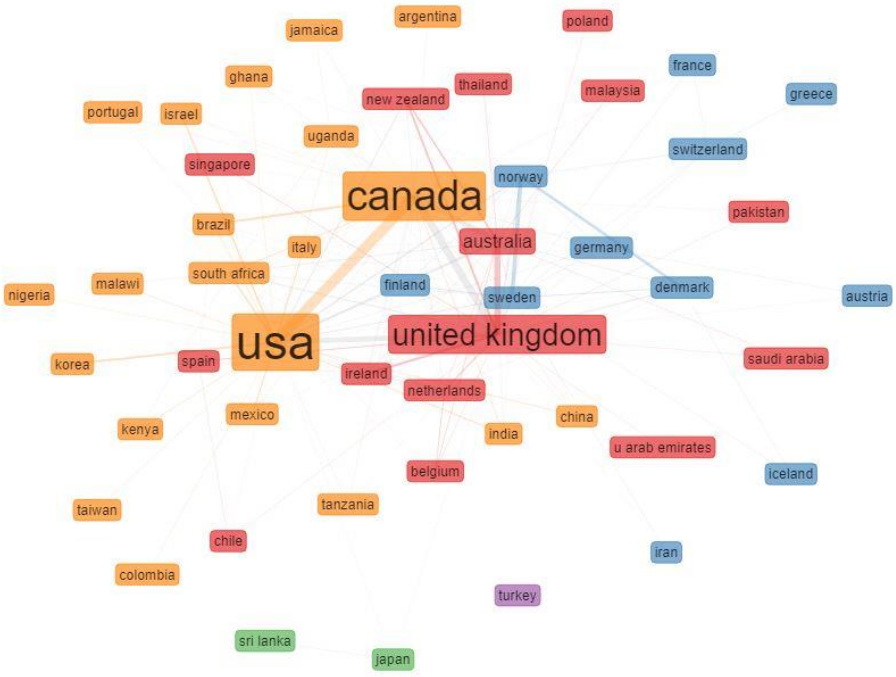

Figure 2. Publication Networks of the Countries

According to the country-level author collaborations, a publication network of 50 countries with the US, Canada, and the UK at the center stands out (analysis thresholds are the first 50 for nodes and 2 for edges). In the publication network, the same-colored countries are placed in the same cluster and the thickness of the lines connecting countries implies the strength of the collaboration. As seen in Figure 2, a strong collaboration exists between Canada and the US. The cluster including these countries consists of a collaboration of 21 countries. Another publication network is the network with the UK at the center. This network shows collaborations of 15 countries from different regions of the

world. The third biggest publication network is the network including Norway, Denmark, and Germany with Sweden at the center. Moreover, it can be argued that Turkey is isolated, and Sri Lanka and Japan establish a collaboration. According to the country-level collaboration networks, another remarkable finding in the networks dominated by the US, the UK, and Canada is that while these countries collaborate mostly with South America, Europe, Africa, the Middle and Far East countries; Europe typically establishes internal collaborations.

Table 5. The Top 10 Most Important Institutions with Regard to Publications

SCR	Institutions	TP	TC	Country
1	Univ Alberta	520	5.039	Canada
2	Univ British Columbia	405	3.950	Canada
3	Univ Toronto	310	2.862	Canada
4	Univ Calgary	253	2.849	Canada
5	Univ Illinois	189	2.277	USA
6	McGill Univ	184	974	Canada
7	Dalhousie Univ	180	613	Canada
8	Cardiff Univ	177	1.141	UK
9	McMaster Univ	177	1.594	Canada
10	Univ Victoria	139	949	Canada

SCR = ranking, TP = publications, TC = total citations

As evident from Table 5, the most productive institutions in qualitative research are the University of Alberta, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Toronto, respectively. These are followed by the University of Calgary and the University of Illinois. It was observed that the first three did not change in the total citation ranking. Analyzing the top 10 institutions in terms of the number of publications, except the University of Illinois (US) and Cardiff University (UK), all publications are produced by Canada. It was determined that the top 10 institutions in terms of the number of publications were Canada-, US-, and UK-based institutions. The collaboration networks of the institutions regarding the number of publications are illustrated in Figure 3.

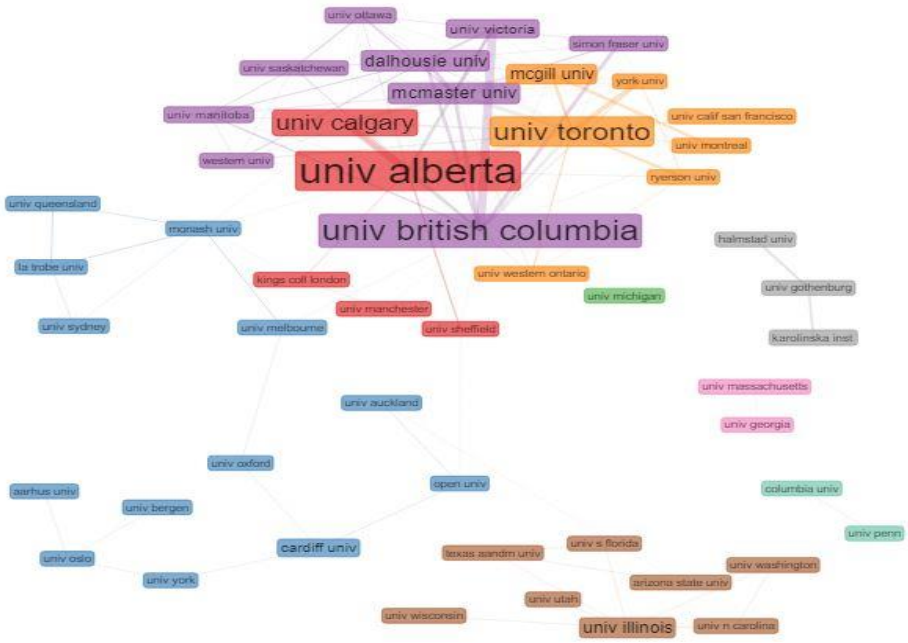

Figure 3. Collaboration Networks of the Institutions

Institutional collaboration networks are also presented in this paper (analysis thresholds are the first 50 for nodes and 2 for edges). Considering each color in Figure 3 represents a cluster and the lines between institutions show collaborations, it can be argued that a huge collaboration network exists in qualitative research. Moreover, except for the independence of the US-centered network including eight institutions formed by the University of Illinois, it can be said that the top 10 countries in terms of the number of publications established intense collaborations.

Publication, Citation, and Network Profiles of Journals, Authors, and Publications

As depicted in Figure 4, while the publication numbers of the SSCI-indexed qualitative research journals in the WoS database exhibited an increase over a 24-year period, especially after 2013, the number of publications displayed a rather fluctuating course.

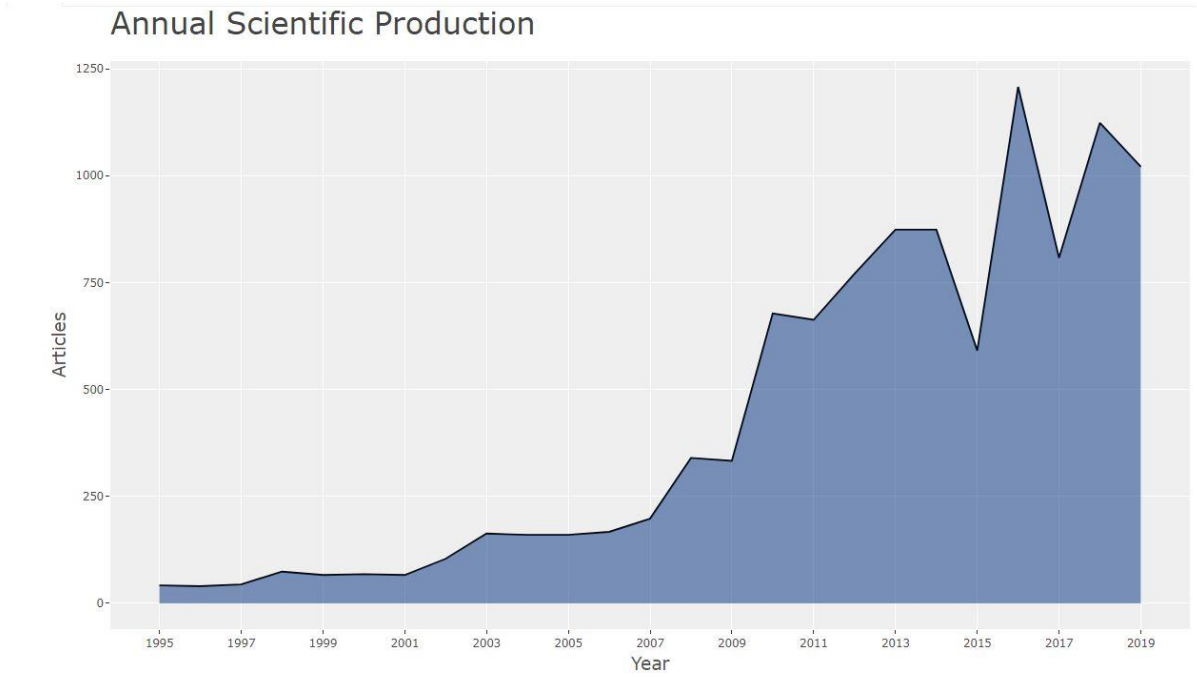

Figure 4. Distribution of Publications per Year

According to the average of the whole period, the increase in the number of publications was calculated as 14.22%. The whole period can be divided into three stages: (1) Until 2007, the number of publications increased steadily. (2) In 2007 (TP:198) and 2016 (TP:1208), the year with the highest number of publications, the publication number increased more than six times on a yearly basis. (3) The number of publications, which was 874 in 2013 remained the same in 2014 and decreased to 591 in 2015. Another striking decrease was in the highest number of publications with 1,208 in 2016 and 808 in 2017.

Table 6. Journals According to The Number of Publications and Citations

Journal	TP	TC	ACd	Publishing Country and Period
The International Journal of Qualitative Methods	3,519	958	0.272	US, 2002–Present
Qualitative Health Research	2,938	7434	2.530	US, 1991–Present
Qualitative Inquiry	1,539	4022	2.613	US, 1995–Present
Qualitative Research	800	2057	2.571	UK, 2001–Present
International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being	599	454	0.758	UK, 2006–Present
Qualitative Social Work	554	781	1.409	US, 2002–Present
Qualitative Sociology	367	508	1.384	US, 1978–Present
Qualitative Research in Psychology	213	689	3.234	UK, 2004–Present
Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management	108	195	1.805	UK, 2004–Present

TP = publications, TC = citations, ACd = average citations per document

As seen in Table 6, the journal with the highest number of publications is The International Journal of Qualitative Methods (3,519), followed by Qualitative Health Research (2938) and Qualitative Inquiry (1539). Among the top 10 journals, there is no country except the US and the UK. When journals are compared in terms of citations, Qualitative Health Research stands out as the most-cited journal (TC: 7,434), followed by Qualitative Inquiry (4022) and Qualitative Research (2057) in the data set. When journals are examined in terms of average citations per document (ACd), it is seen that the Qualitative Research in Psychology (ACd: 3.234) stands out, followed by Qualitative Inquiry (ACd: 2.613) and Qualitative Research (ACd: 2.571). It has been observed that The International Journal of Qualitative Methods stands out in terms of number of publications and so does Qualitative Health Research in terms of total citations, and finally Qualitative Research in Psychology in terms of ACd.

The Top 10 Most Influential Authors in Terms of Publications and Citations

The contributions of authors to qualitative research literature were appraised based on the number of publications, citations, and collaborations.

Table 7. The Top 10 Most Influential Authors in Terms of Publications and Citations

Authors	TP	FP	Authors	TC
Morse JM	157	142.5250	Denzin NK	1,643
Staller KM	34	30.7500	Glaser BG	1,118
Dickson SV	34	11.9167	Morse JM	1,053
Kenny A	32	10.5750	Charmaz K	979
Thorne SE	32	10.0151	Foucault M	896
Liebenberg L	31	20.5742	Strauss AL	827
Clark AM	26	11.9909	Goffman E	776
Koro-Ljunberg ME	26	5.2351	Lincoln YS	738
Lahman MKE	25	10.0176	Sandelowski M	634
Adams J	21	9.4000	Deleuze G	599

TP = publications, FP = fractionalized publications, TC = total citations

The top 10 authors with the highest number of publications and citations were determined. As seen in Table 7, Morse is at the top of the list with a remarkable number of publications of 157. Even the following authors, Staller and Dickson, have 34 publications each. Moreover, to determine the actual contributions of the most influential authors of the literature, fractionalized publications (FPs) were also analyzed in this study. This method compares the publications according to the number of authors to determine an author's contribution to a publication (Aria, Misuraca, and Spano, 2020). According to the number of FPs of Morse (FP = 142.525), the most important factor is that a majority of his publications are produced by him alone. Likewise, Staller, who was in the second place on the list (FP = 30.75) produced a majority of his publications by himself. Liebenberg (FP = 20.5742) was in the third place on the FP list. With regard to citations, as seen in Table 7, it was found that no authors except Morse were on the list of the top 10 most influential authors. Denzin is the most influential author in terms of citations (TC = 1,643), followed by Glaser (1,118) and Morse (1,053). Considering the top 10 most influential authors in terms of citations, with respect to the research fields, Denzin, Goffman, Glaser, and Charmaz's study field is sociology; Sandelowski, Strauss, and Morse's is health; Lincoln's is educational administration; and finally, Deleuze and Foucault's is philosophy. It can be argued that qualitative literature mostly entails sociology, health, philosophy, and education disciplines. Publication networks of the authors were also examined in this study as schematically presented in Figure 5.

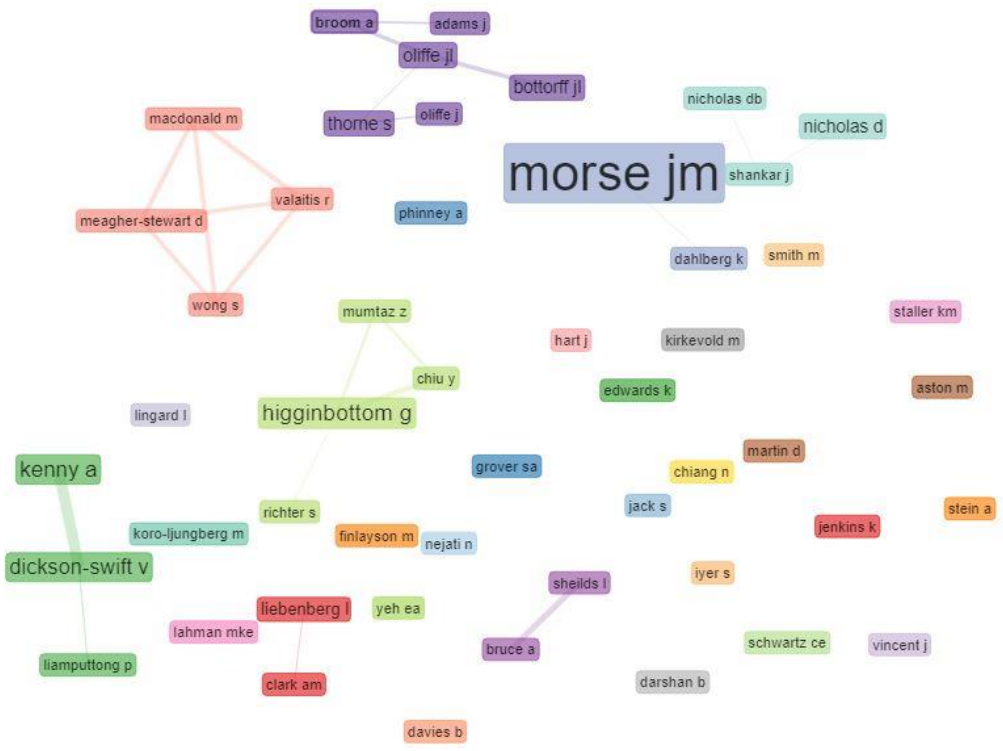

Figure 5. Publication Networks of the Authors

The authors were also analyzed for co-authorship. Co-authorship networks reveal the network between the collaborating authors and furnish insights about the leading authors in the field and the dynamics of academic knowledge production. In this regard, co-authorship networks with the most powerful connections were identified. In Figure 5, the lines between the authors display the collaboration between authors, and the thickness of these lines reflects the strength of collaborations. In addition, the size of the author's name is an indicator of the author's publication history. It is evident from Figure 5 that the biggest collaboration is the network of six authors including Thorne and Oliffe. Considering the research fields of the authors included in this network, it was seen that they established collaborations in medical sciences, such as nursing and psychological health. The second biggest collaboration is the network of four authors including Wong and Valaitis. The third biggest collaboration is the network of Mumtaz, Richter, Chiu, and Higginbottom. Finally, the collaboration network of Kenny, Dickson-Swift, and Liamputtong is worth noting. According to the collaboration networks in the data set, it can be underlined that the majority of author collaborations are in the field of medical sciences.

The Most Cited Publications, Research Topics, and Changes in Topics over Time

Table 8. The Top 10 Most Cited Publications

SCR	Paper	Theme	TC	ACy
1	Hsieh H F and Shannon SE (2005) Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research* 15(9): 1277–1288.	Data analysis	11,444	715.2500
2	Flyvbjerg B (2006) Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative inquiry* 12(2): 219–245.	Method	3,769	251.2667
3	Tracy SJ (2010) Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative inquiry* 16(10): 837–851.	How to	1,179	107.1818
4	Bowen GA (2008) Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: a research note. *Qualitative research* 8(1): 137–152.	Saturation	879	67.6154
5	Starks H and Brown Trinidad S (2007) Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative health research* 17(10): 1372–1380.	Method	704	50.2857
6	Guillemin M and Gillam L (2004) Ethics, reflexivity, and "ethically important moments" in research. *Qualitative inquiry* 10(2): 261–280.	Ethics	628	36.9412
7	Malterud K, Siersma VD and Guassora AD (2016) Sample size in qualitative interview studies: guided by information power. *Qualitative health research* 26(13): 1753–1760.	Sample size	624	124.8000
8	Morse JM (2000) Determining sample size. *Qualitative Health Research* 10(1): 3–5.	Sample size	598	28.4762

9	Morse JM (1995) The significance of saturation, *Qualitative Health Research* 5(2): 147–149.	Saturation	595	22.8846
10	Whittemore R, Chase SK and Mandle CL (2001) Validity in qualitative research. *Qualitative health research* 11(4): 522–537.	Validity	557	27.8500

SCR = ranking, TP = publications, TC = citations, ACy= average citations per year

As seen in Table 8, the content analysis study conducted by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) received extraordinary attention with 11,444 total citations and an average of 715.25 citations per year (ACy). This publication was followed by Flyvbjerg (TC = 3,769) and Tracy (TC = 1,179). Moreover, the dataset was also analyzed regarding ACy. Again, Hsieh and Shannon (ACy = 715.25) displayed an extraordinary average, followed by Flyvbjerg (ACy =251.2667), Malterud et al. (ACy = 124.800) and Tracy (107.1818). The analysis of the publications revealed that the most cited publications were regarding qualitative data analysis, case studies, and how to conduct high-quality qualitative research. Considering the number of citations per year, it can be argued that in addition to the above-mentioned topics, scholars frequently cited studies about sample size in qualitative interviews.

According to the top 10 most cited publications, it was found that the most used, searched, and studied topics in qualitative research were data analysis, method selection, how to conduct a qualitative research, saturation and sample size, ethical issues, and validity.

Topic/Term Profiles

Table 9. Top 10 Most Frequent Words

Terms	Frequency
Health	601
Experience	507
Care	435
Women	358
People	312
Qualitative research	237
Perception	218
Children	204
Life	202
Illness	184

As can be seen in Table 9, the most frequent word is health (601), followed by experience (507), care (435), and women (358). Analysis of most frequent words provides an insight into the most addressed and studied subjects in qualitative research. The terms such as health, care, life, and illness indicate a high proportion of medical sciences in qualitative research. The terms women, people, and children reflect data sources in qualitative research. Moreover, the words experience and

perception accentuate the most prominent topics that qualitative researchers mostly discuss, be inquisitive about, and study. The annual occurrence of the words is presented in Figure 6.

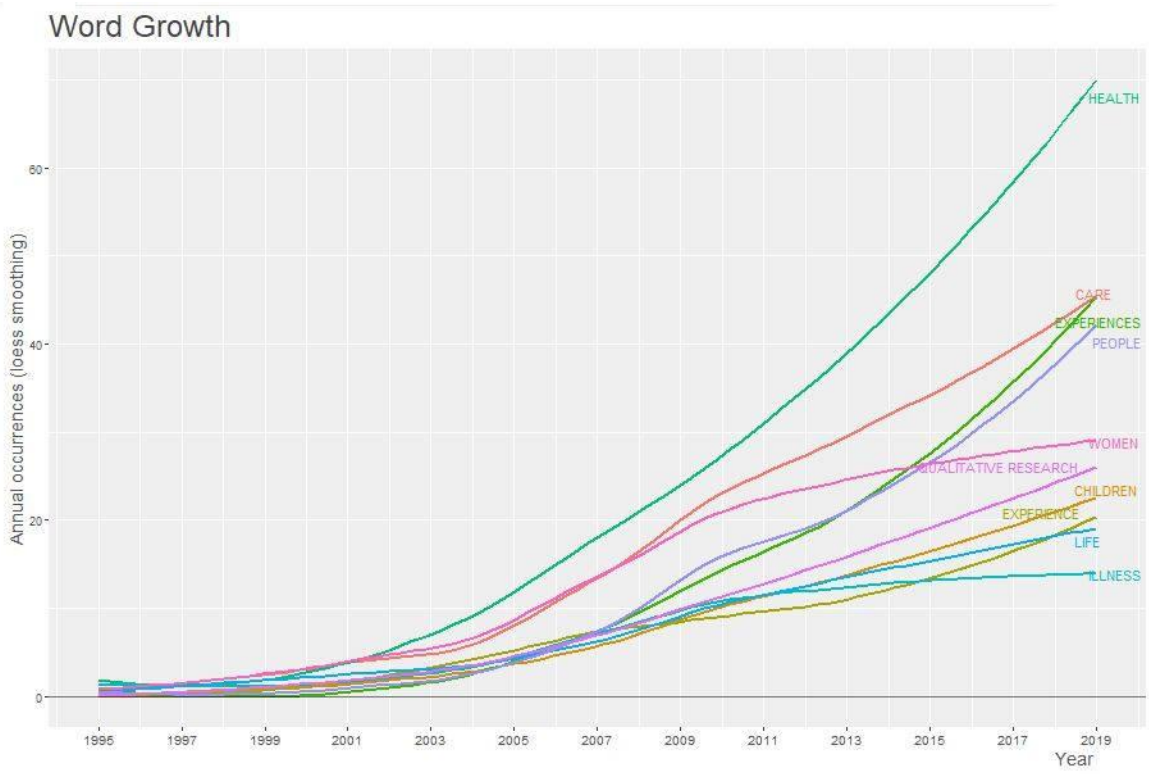

Figure 6. The Annual Occurrence of the Words

Figure 6 illustrates the evolution of the top 10 most frequent words that started to change after 2001. It can be said that from this date, the term "health" is the most frequent word and the terms care, experience and people are displayed a constant increase. As seen in the graph, while the frequency of all words increased, the term "women" was in second place until 2005, it fell into fifth place in 2019 and accordingly, its rising curve became stable after 2005. On the contrary, while the term "experience" was in fifth place in 2009, displayed almost the same frequency as the term care in 2019. A co-occurrence network analysis was also conducted in this study.

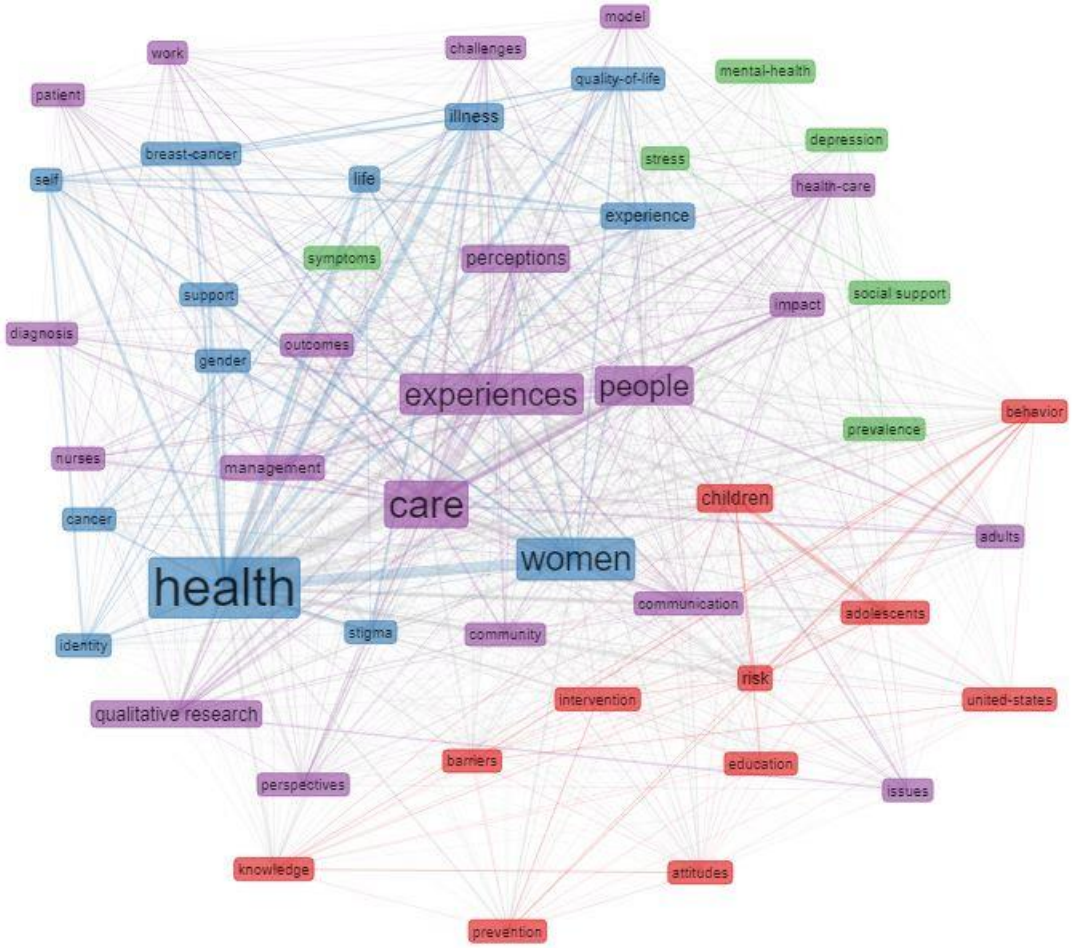

Figure 7. The Co-Occurrence Network

According to the co-occurrence network presented in Figure 7, it was observed that the words are displayed in four different colors of blue, red, violet, and green and are connected by multiple edges. The thickness of the lines between the edges shows the co-occurrence frequency of the terms. In this regard, the term “health” is mostly studied with the terms “gender,” “self,” “women,” “experience,” “quality of life,” “life,” “stigma,” “identity,” “illness,” “support,” “cancer,” and “breast cancer.” The second most notable cluster is violet-colored and includes 20 terms: “qualitative research,” “care,” “experiences,” “people,” “perception,” “management,” “challenges,” “communication,” “issues,” “perspectives,” “adults,” “nurses,” “outcomes,” “community,” “health-care,” “impact,” “patient,” “model,” “work,” and “diagnosis.” The third biggest cluster includes the terms “education,” “knowledge,” “behavior,” “attitudes,” “intervention,” “prevention,” “risk,” “adolescents,” “children,” “barriers,” and “united-states.” The last cluster is red-colored and is constituted by the words “mental-health,” “prevalence,” “social support,” “stress,” “depression,” and “symptoms.” After a meticulous analysis of these clusters, it was realized that each cluster

approximately describes a different field in qualitative literature. Accordingly, the first cluster implies the qualitative research topics directly related to a patient's experiences after a physical or surgical treatment. Likewise, the second cluster is related to “health”; however, typically it is about the concepts of interpersonal relationships and experiences. The third cluster including the term “education” is mostly about the concepts of interpersonal relationships and experiences of individuals in education. Finally, the last cluster generally comprises psychology-related terms. To summarize, each network represents the following four fields:

- Individuals' self-experiences regarding an illness or surgery
- Individuals' social experiences in healthcare
- Analyzing knowledge, attitude, and behaviors related to education
- Social psychology

Thematic Evolution in Publications During the Said Four Phases

The thematic evolution of qualitative literature was also analyzed in this study. This thematic evolution displays the evolution of research trends in qualitative research over time. Thematic evolution enables us to analyze the change dynamics in research fields based on four quadrants. These quadrants were explicated by Cahlık (2000) as follows:

- The themes in the first quadrant (upper right) are both well developed and vital for a research field.
- The themes in the second quadrant (lower right) are important for structuring a research field but are not well developed.
- The themes in the third quadrant (lower left) are both weak and marginal.
- The themes included in the fourth quadrant (upper left) promote the internal connections, but have inconsequential external connections, and therefore, are not critical for structuring a research field.

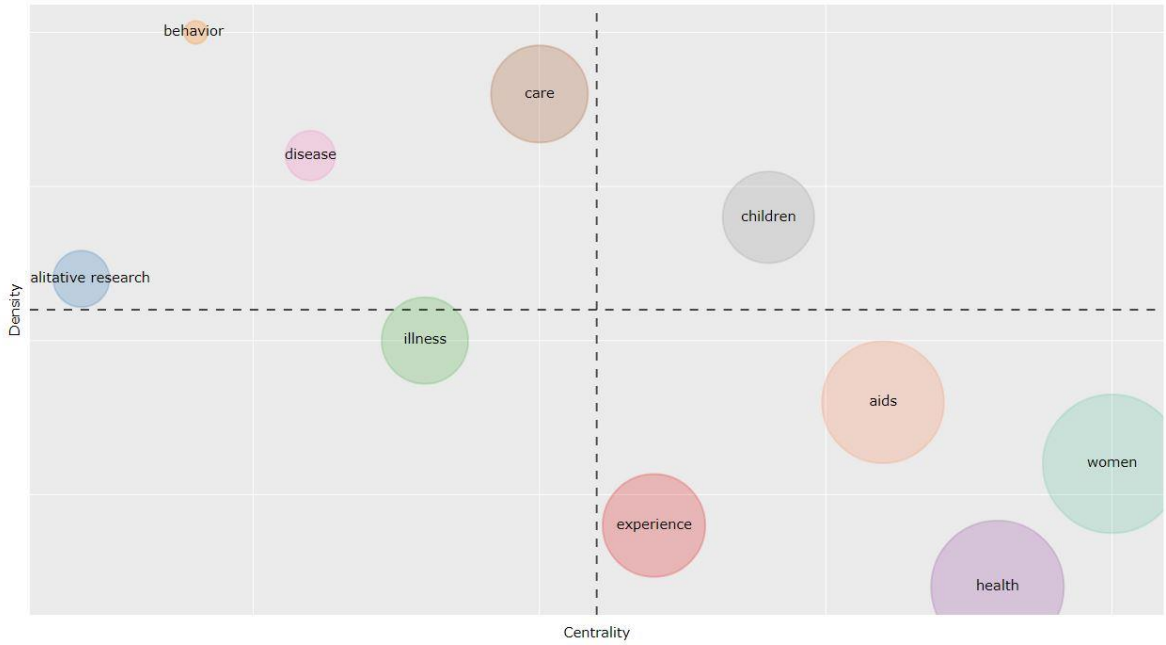

Figure 8. Thematic Evolution (1995-2003)

As evident from Figure 8, 10 principal topics emerged in the 1995–2003 period. Children was the motor theme in the first sub-period. Women, with a high centrality, was the novel basic theme, together with AIDS, health, and experience that consolidated their position as transversal themes. Illness, shifted in the third quadrant, becoming a marginal theme, with a lower centrality. In the fourth quadrant, behavior appeared as an extremely specialized theme for the corresponding period, together with care, disease, and qualitative research with a high density.

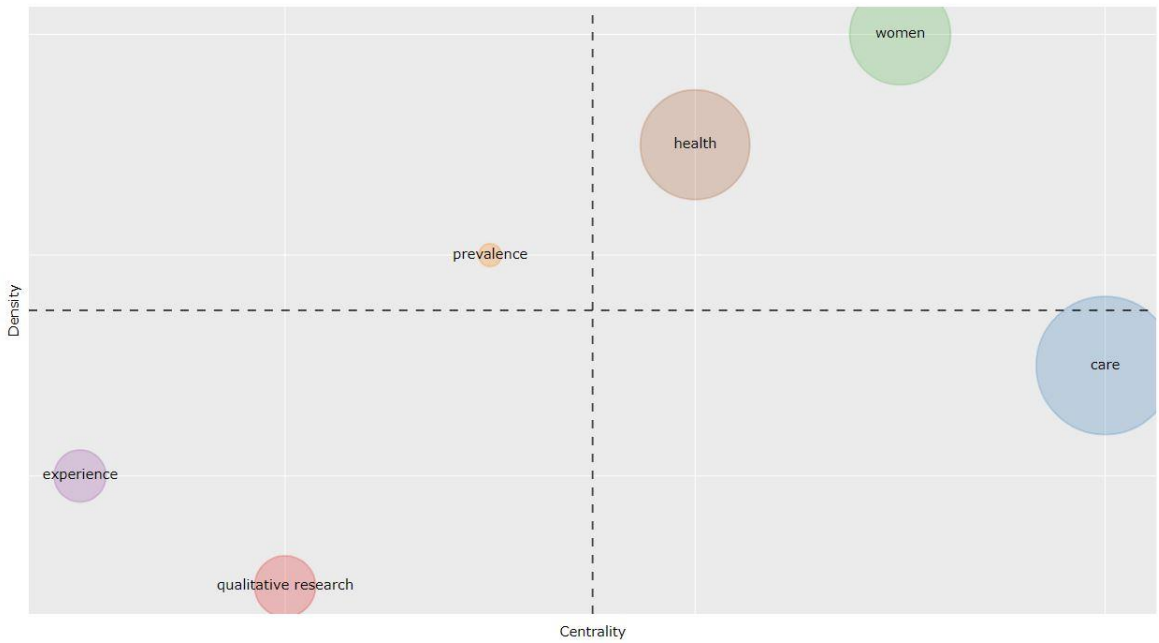

Figure 9. Thematic Evolution (2004-2012)

As depicted in Figure 9, women and health, which are transversal themes compared to the previous period, became motor themes in this period. Care, which was marginal in the previous period, became general and transversal in this period with higher centrality. Qualitative research, shifted in the third quadrant becoming a marginal theme, with a lower centrality and density. Experience, which was a general and important theme in the previous period, lost its importance and centrality. Prevalence appeared in the fourth quadrant as a very specialized theme of the associated period.

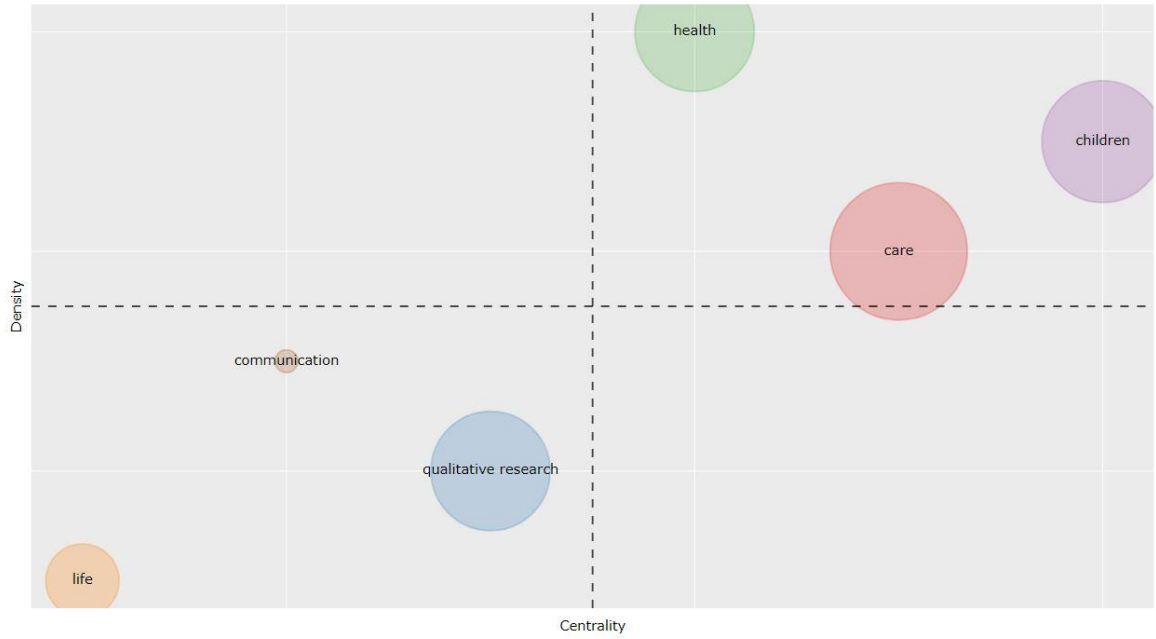

Figure 10. Thematic Evolution (2013-2019)

As displayed in Figure 10, in the 2013–2019 period, children reappeared as the motor theme with a high density and centrality. Health has evidently maintained its place. While women was a motor theme in the previous period, it was replaced by care. In the third quadrant, qualitative research remained a marginal theme, but increased its centrality and density. Life appeared as a marginal theme with a low density and centrality. Communication also appeared as a marginal theme with a relatively higher density and centrality compared to life.

Thematic Evolution of Qualitative Research Through the Sub-Periods.

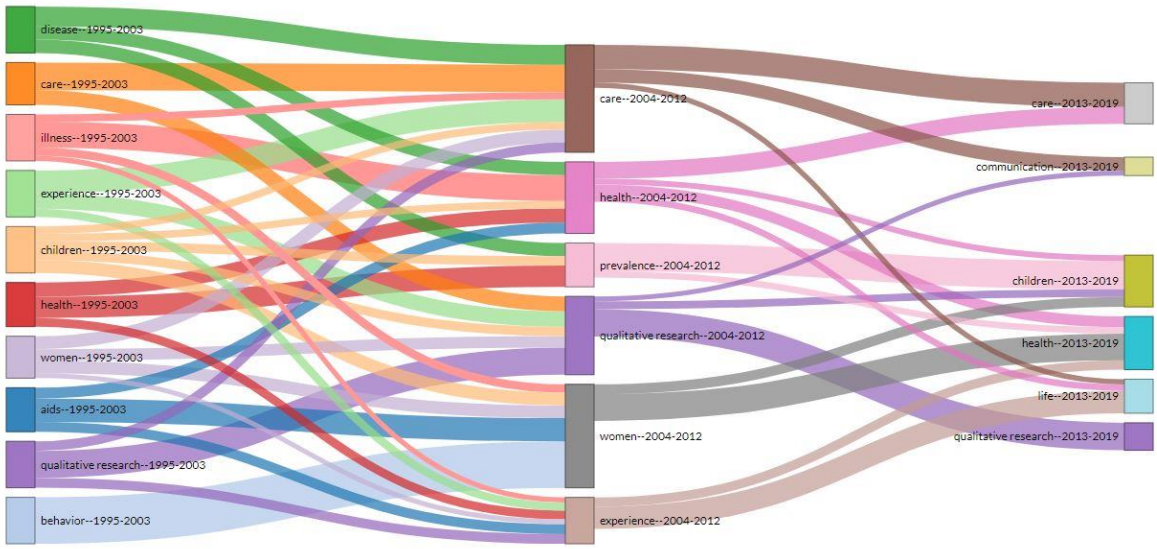

Figure 11. The Thematic Evolution of Qualitative Research (1995-2019)

The Sankey diagram in Figure 11 illustrates transitions between the most frequent words in the selected periods. In the first sub-period, the prevalence of health-related concepts draws attention. The terms “disease,” “care,” “illness,” “health,” and “AIDS” can be associated with research fields; the terms “women” and “children” can be associated with participants; and finally, the terms “experience” and “behavior” can be associated with making sense of human experiences. In the second sub-period, a reduction in sub-concepts attracts attention. Different from the previous period, the concept of prevalence emerged among studied concepts. While the concepts of experience, women, and health stand out in the first two periods, differently, the term “communication” emerged in the final period.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussion

Our research using the data set obtained from WoS endeavored to demonstrate the global spread of qualitative research. This paper reached a remarkable result in terms of showing the countries and institutions in the “center.” In the center (Hsiung, 2012, 2015; Gobo, 2011; Suadez-Estrada, 2017), the relationship network with the US, the UK, and Canada (36 countries included) has emerged clearly. In total, eight of the top 10 productive institutions are from Canada and the remaining two are from the US and the UK. Moreover, these institutions establish strong collaboration networks. It confirms the argument of Anglophone-dominated science categorization by Gobo (2011), Hsiung (2012, 2015) and Alasuutari (2004), it also asserts that Canada is an important partner of this domination.

However, the relationship network trend of the US and Canada differs from that of the UK. The US and Canada turn to global collaborations. However, the UK is turning to both global and intra-European cooperation. Therefore, Europe constitutes a unique case for cooperating within itself, except for the central countries. Considering this result, it cannot be said that the center and periphery arguments (Hsiung, 2012) fully explicate the European example. Nevertheless, the results of the research confirm the existence of the "center countries" in qualitative research. Moreover, it has been observed that the “center countries" cooperated with many different countries/institutions in the same historical period. The same does not hold true for countries outside the center. Therefore, the network of relations is generally developing between the countries in the center and other countries. The relationship that neighboring countries at the periphery is weak. This again confirms the role played by central countries in qualitative research.

The status of being a center also applies to the number and frequency of content produced in the countries mentioned. The overwhelming majority of publications in the journals reviewed come from one of three countries. These are again the US, the UK, and Canada, the top countries in terms of number of publications. When taken in conjunction with previous results, it implies the central-peripheral distinction (Estrada, 2017), which is considered as present in social science, is also present in qualitative research.

Researchers conducting qualitative research mostly have multi-authored publications. An average of 443.2 publications is produced annually. Results reveal that the most cited studies are mostly about qualitative data analysis, case studies, how to conduct a qualitative research, and sample size in qualitative interviews.

This implies that publications focused on the definitions or practices of qualitative research have attracted considerable attention. Considering that the publications made in the central countries receive more acceptance and interest, Hsiung's (2012, 2015) argument seems more realistic. Therefore, based on this research, it can be said that the contents published in the center are deemed as more crucial in terms of what qualitative research means. To look at it from another perspective, perhaps, as suggested by Loseke and Cahill (2007), the decisions concerning selecting the right options for making references about the definitions of what qualitative research is, may plausibly increase the acceptance rate of submissions from central countries.

Reay (2014) summarized the strategies that should be used when publishing a qualitative research. Smith (1987), just like Reay (2014), wrote an article on publishing qualitative research, this time focusing on different forms in qualitative research. However, when these and similar contents are examined, it can be observed that a window is not opened for international researchers. Again, it is clear that such contents do not refer to a global context and various cultures and societies. It may cause one to think that if the researchers comply with the rules, they will have the opportunity to

publish without any restrictions. However, this research shows that the opportunity to publish is not just directly related to the behavior of following the rules; rather as stated by Loseke and Cahill (2007), power dynamics need to be brought to the agenda more.

This research demonstrates that qualitative research is implemented more in certain disciplines.

Qualitative literature typically consists of sociology, health, philosophy, and education disciplines. Tracy (2010) argued that the first criteria for producing excellent qualitative research are to find "a worthy topic." The findings of this paper affirm that certain concepts are more "worthy topics" than others in qualitative research. An analysis of research topics revealed that studies focus predominantly on individuals' self and social experiences about an illness or surgery, examination of individuals' knowledge, attitude, and behaviors in education, and social psychology.

Tracy (2010) asserted that any subject in qualitative research ought to be relevant, timely, crucial, and interesting. For instance, Reay (2014) and Smith (1987) and Tracy (2010) did not open any window for global researchers of qualitative research. When others are also examined, no particular criterion (Tracy, 2010), strategy (Reay, 2014), or format (Smith, 1987) were presented to prevent qualitative research studies and researchers from being stuck in central countries. The motivation of such a logic itself is indeed debatable. The golden criterion, strategy, and logic of form can impose a uniform and thus dominating language. Therefore, as Alasutaari (2007) cogently argued, it is imperative to defend the existence of qualitative research styles, criteria, and strategies that vary at a global level rather than a single form or definition.

Results

This study shows that qualitative research is constrained by the widely discussed phenomenon of central-peripheral differences. The analysis of the institutions with the highest number of publications, most cited publications, and collaborations of institutions revealed that the central countries, the UK, the US, and Canada are not only at the top of the list, but also left no room for other institutions and researchers.

The results of this research confirm the existence of "center countries" in qualitative research. Moreover, it has been observed that the center countries cooperated with many different countries and institutions in the same time period, i.e., 2000– 2020.

Centrality also applies to the number and frequency of publications produced. This finding confirms the productivity of the above-mentioned countries, institutions, and researchers. However, the same situation indicates that limited research, limited cooperation, and limited publications furnishing information on different cultures, societies, and situations are available for the global

community. An overwhelming majority of publications in the journals reviewed comes from one of three countries. In other words, it can be remarked that the meaning of qualitative research is determined by the researchers from the central countries.

The results of the research are interesting as they show that certain subjects are studied relatively more frequently in qualitative research. Our results further reveal that studies focus mostly on "individuals' self and social experiences about an illness or surgery, examination of individuals' knowledge, attitude, and behaviors in education, and social psychology."

This study aimed to profile an enormous body of literature by examining 10,637 publications by 16,884 researchers. Our research was limited to the determined inclusion / exclusion criteria. No need to express that qualitative research is not limited to these contents/publications. There are hundreds of thousands of qualitative research-based publications in sources that our research data cannot cover. Therefore, the readers of the research should take into account that the study presents a photograph limited only to the contents examined. Another limitation of the study is the language limitation in the data source. This study examined only the contents published in the English language. This limitation restrains our knowledge of qualitative research content profiles published in different languages.

Recommendations

Including researchers from different parts of the global world in qualitative research publications and collaborations is reckoned as indispensable. To make this possible, several solutions can be considered. For instance, prestigious publishers and journals may establish an actual international study group and an international perspective, support multinational publications, and support publications in different languages in addition to English. In a general sense, cultural differences must not be considered as a factor creating difficulty in editorial processes for the international community (Alasuutari, 2004). As suggested by Chenail et al. (2007), if publishers and editors exhibit a supportive attitude toward publications and researchers from different cultures and communicate with cultural differences through negotiation, such processes can become more productive.

We have proposed some research avenues. By the latest version these avenues as: Researchers using bibliometric method can benefit from larger databases to monitor the actual and historical patterns of qualitative research. It would also be a research aim to monitor the area specific bibliometric studies. It would be really interesting to compare and contrast the patterns in general and area-specific studies related to qualitative research.

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