

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF POPULATION STUDIES

**EVALUATION OF THE USE OF QUALITATIVE CONTENT  
ANALYSIS IN GRADUATE THESES**

Emetullah Mümine BARKÇİN

Department of Social Research Methodology

Master's Thesis

Ankara

April, 2019



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Supervisor

Assoc. Prof. Dr. İlknur YÜKSEL-KAPTANOĞLU

Department of Social Research Methodology

Master's Thesis

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April, 2019

Evaluation of the Use of Qualitative Content Analysis in Graduate Theses

Emetullah Mümine BARKÇIN

This is to certify that we have read and examined this thesis and in our opinion it fulfills the requirements in scope and quality of a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Social Research Methodology.

Jury Members:

Member (Chair): 

Prof. Dr. Kezban ÇELİK

Ted University, Department of Sociology

Member (Supervisor): 

Assoc. Prof. Dr. İlknur YÜKSEL-KAPTANOĞLU

Hacettepe University, Institute of Population Studies, Department of Social Research Methodology

Member:

Prof. Dr. A. Banu ERGÖÇMEN

Hacettepe University, Institute of Population Studies, Department of Demography

This thesis has been accepted by the above-signed members of the Jury and has been confirmed by the Administrative Board of the Institute of Population Studies, Hacettepe University.

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Student No: N15122102

Department: Social Research Methodology

Program: Social Research Methodology

Status:  Masters  Ph.D.  Integrated Ph.D.

15/05/2019

*M. Barçın*

**ADVISOR APPROVAL**

APPROVED.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. İknur YÜKSEL KAPTANOĞLU

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# EVALUATION OF THE USE OF QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS IN GRADUATE THESES

*Yazar* Emetullah Mümine Barkçin



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# EVALUATION OF THE USE OF QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS IN GRADUATE THESES

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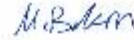
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## SUMMARY

Qualitative content analysis has started to be used more in the recent years, especially in the last decade. This trend exists in Turkey as well. It can be said the method was founded in 1952 by Berelson, when his book *Content Analysis in Communication Research* was published. In this book, Berelson defined content analysis as a quantitative research technique. Criticisms arose shortly after, with Kracauer being the first critique. In the same year, Kracauer (1952) published an article titled *The Challenge of Qualitative Content Analysis*, in which he rejected content analysis being labeled as quantitative, and declared that the method, in fact, is a qualitative technique. The debate about if content analysis is quantitative or qualitative has been going on about since then, and content analysis has been studied methodologically as well as being used as a research technique. The motivation of this study is to identify the process and characteristics of qualitative content analysis. The aims of this study are, first, to contribute to the methodology literature in Turkey and, second, to explain how the technique is conducted and, if there is any, to overcome the misunderstandings about it.

In this study, qualitative content analysis is used as the research technique. First, with literature review, it is aimed to understand the background of content analysis, where it is used, and how qualitative content analysis is conducted. With qualitative content analysis, it is aimed to identify the characteristics of the technique. For this aim, Master's and PhD theses which are written in Turkey and used qualitative content analysis in their studies are analyzed. The theses are selected from Council of Higher Education's online Thesis Center through consecutive unit type purposive sampling. There are 27 Master's and 15 PhD theses in the sample.

After conducting qualitative content analysis on the sample, it is found that there is confusion about how to conduct qualitative content analysis. To overcome this confusion, some pathways are offered about conducting qualitative content analysis for researchers to reveal the difficulties related with the technique.

Keywords: qualitative research techniques, qualitative content analysis, methodology

## ÖZET

Nitel içerik analizi son yıllarda, özellikle son on yılda, daha fazla kullanılmaya başlamıştır. Bu eğilim, Türkiye’de de bulunmaktadır. Bu yöntemin temellerinin 1952 yılında Berelson tarafından, *İletişim Araştırmalarında İçerik Analizi* başlıklı kitabı yayımlandığında atıldığı söylenebilir. Berelson, kitabında içerik analizini nicel bir analiz tekniği olarak tanımlamıştır. Kısa süre sonra, kitabı eleştirilmeye başlamıştır ve Kracauer de Berelson’ın ilk eleştirmeni olmuştur. Kracauer (1952), aynı yıl yayımladığı *Nitel İçerik Analizinin Zorluğu* başlıklı makalesinde içerik analizinin nicel bir yöntem olarak adlandırılmasına karşı çıkmış ve bu yöntemin aslında nitel bir teknik olduğunu belirtmiştir. İçerik analizinin nicel mi yoksa nitel mi olacağı tartışması o zamandan beri devam etmektedir ve bu süreçte içerik analizi hem metodolojik olarak çalışılmış hem de bir araştırma yöntemi olarak kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın motivasyonu nitel içerik analizinin sürecini ve özelliklerini belirlemektir. Bu çalışmanın hedefleri ise Türkiye’deki yöntembilim alanyazınına katkıda bulunmak ve bu tekniğin nasıl uygulandığını açıklamak, varsa, ilgili yanlış anlaşılımları gidermektir.

Bu çalışmada araştırma tekniği olarak nitel içerik analizi kullanılmıştır. İlk olarak literatür taramasıyla içerik analizinin arka planını, nerelerde kullanıldığını ve nitel içerik analizinin nasıl uygulandığını anlamak amaçlanmıştır. Nitel içerik analiziyle ise bu tekniğin özelliklerinin belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Bunun için Türkiye’de yazılmış ve çalışmalarında nitel içerik analizi kullanmış yüksek lisans ve doktora tezleri incelenmiştir. Tezler, Yükseköğretim Kurulunun çevrimiçi Ulusal Tez Merkezi’nden, amaçlı örnekleme yönteminin bir türü olan ardışık birim örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilmiştir. Örneklemede 27 yüksek lisans, 15 doktora tezi bulunmaktadır.

Nitel içerik analizi, örneklem üzerinde uygulandıktan sonra, nitel içerik analizinin nasıl kullanılacağına ilişkin bir karışıklık olduğu görülmüştür. Bu karışıklığı aşmak için araştırmacılara, nitel içerik analizinin kullanımına yönelik olarak, teknik ile ilgili karşılaşılan zorlukları göstermek amacıyla bazı yollar önerilmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: nitel araştırma teknikleri, nitel içerik analizi, metodoloji

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	i
SUMMARY .....	ii
ÖZET .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
ABBREVIATIONS .....	viii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1. Motivation and Aims of the Study.....	4
1.2. Research Question and Sub-questions of the Study .....	5
1.3. Method of the Study.....	6
CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	9
2.1. The Foundation of Content Analysis .....	9
2.2. Areas of Use and Aims of Content Analysis .....	12
2.3. Periods of Content Analysis.....	14
2.3.1. Foundation to 1950s.....	15
2.3.2. From 1950s to 2000 .....	16
2.3.3. Beginning of the 21 <sup>st</sup> century .....	21
2.4. Emerging Debates in the Field.....	25
2.4.1. Reaching trustworthiness in content analysis .....	25
2.4.2. Quantitative content analysis vs. qualitative content analysis .....	29
2.4.3. Analyzing manifest vs. latent content in content analysis .....	35
2.5. How to Conduct Qualitative Content Analysis.....	37
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY .....	51
3.1. Method of the study .....	56
3.2. Ethical procedures.....	58
3.3. Limitations .....	59
CHAPTER 4. EVALUATION OF THE METHODOLOGIES OF THESES .....	61
4.1. Categories .....	61
4.2. Themes .....	65
4.2.1. Confusion about fundamentals of paradigms .....	67
4.2.2. “Validating” qualitative analysis .....	71

4.2.3. Misunderstanding of the techniques .....	72
4.2.4. Vagueness in definitions .....	75
4.2.5. Ethical appropriateness .....	78
4.2.6. Primary references .....	83
4.2.7. Making “reliable” and reaching trustworthiness.....	84
4.2.8. Prioritizing structure .....	86
4.2.9. Use of language.....	88
4.2.10. Use of technology .....	89
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION .....	95
REFERENCES .....	98
APPENDIX.....	102
APPENDIX A.....	102
APPENDIX B.....	104

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 2.1.</b> Inter-coder Reliability in Content Analysis	27
<b>Table 2.2.</b> Advantages and Disadvantages of Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis	33
<b>Table 2.3.</b> Differences among Three Approaches	42
<b>Table 3.1.</b> Phases and Stages of Theme Development in Qualitative Content Analysis	53



**LIST OF FIGURES**

**Figure 4.1.** Relationships between Themes

66





## ABBREVIATIONS

CoHE Council of Higher Education



## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Paradigms are the source of methods, problem areas and solution standards to these problems as accepted by a scientific community in a certain time. Therefore, to accept a new paradigm means defining the scientific field in hand all over (as cited in Kuş, 2012). In social sciences there are quantitative and qualitative research traditions. Quantitative research is highly associated with positivistic paradigm, in which there is an assumption that there is one true reality to explore. This approach is deemed to be of natural sciences. Quantitative approaches have been in effect, especially in United States, since 1945 (Neuman, 2014). On the other hand, qualitative research techniques have emerged as a reaction to long standing quantitative approaches in social sciences. Qualitative research is highly interpretive, in which the belief is the “reality” is subjective and there is not one true reality. The aim of qualitative research is to understand these subjective perceptions of reality. There are different approaches in qualitative research; however, what they all have in common is that they adopt a constructivist, subjectivist and interpretivist understanding, which lead them to refuse the idea that science is rational and objective (Kuş, 2012). Corbin and Strauss (2008) declare that the world is complex, so there are no simple explanations of anything. Thus, methodologies that try to understand the experiences and explain the situations should also be complicated. In qualitative research, the researcher tries to comprehend different points of view and experiences, which cannot be separated from political, social, cultural and other related events of the world we live in. The researcher is aware of this, therefore they keep these perspectives in mind, which are essential in qualitative research.

Qualitative research roots from the Chicago School in sociology in 1920s and 1930s. Although the qualitative approach seems to be older than the quantitative, the latter had, and still has, much more effect in social sciences. Quantitative approach especially peaked in the 1960s-1970s in North America, Britain, and Scandinavia. However, it is said to lose its power from the 1980s (Neuman, 2014). Thus, it can be said that qualitative approaches have started to gain power in these years, and to this day, they still have a significant power. It is important to decide which approach to

use in a study, and since these are very different in conducting research, the decision is usually made based on the research questions (Bryman, 1988).

Flick (2013) states that qualitative research has undergone three levels of expansion in the last decades. In the first level, qualitative research made itself acceptable in various science fields other than sociology, anthropology and education. Nowadays, qualitative techniques are being used in nursing, medicine, political science, psychology, social work and the like. Although these techniques are not used as the main methodology in these fields, they have created a place in them. This development in the first level has caused a gap in the methodological developments and research practice. Expanding in different fields resulted in the emergence of various approaches and methods for data analyzing, such as content analysis, conversation analysis, and grounded theory. The third level of development in qualitative research is the change of data types. Transcriptions of interviews and focus groups and observation protocols are the standard, traditional data types; however, at the present, visual, virtual, written and other types of data are added to these. The reason behind emerging of this much type of data is that with time, expressions of individual and social experiences have also changed (Flick, 2013).

Corbin and Strauss (2008), suggest the researchers to always keep the data in mind, comparing knowledge and experience against it. They also suggest working with the dimensions and features of concepts as they focus the researcher on data's differences and similarities. Last thing Corbin and Strauss (2008) remind the researchers about is that what matters in the research is the perceptions of the participants of a specific event.

There are certain characteristics of qualitative research, as it is a combination of approaches which oppose quantitative approaches. Creswell (2016) explains that qualitative research starts with assumptions, and the use of interpretive/theoretical frames. Qualitative researchers adopt an approach, in which they are sensitive to the natural settings of the topic or persons under study using both inductive and deductive analysis. Another characteristic of qualitative research is when reporting the results;

researchers include their thoughts about the issue, participants' voices, and complex explanations and interpretations of the issue (Creswell, 2016).

In qualitative research, the researcher is the main organ to generate data. This is because; the researcher him/herself observes or interviews the participants. The data generation is usually completed this way. Qualitative researchers also have the potential to use more than one technique during the research. They can use observation, in-depth interviews and documents to generate data for their study. Another characteristic of qualitative research is that the pattern of the study appears as the process continues. This means that every stage of the research can change in the course of going to the field and generating data. One important aspect of qualitative research is that researchers can position themselves in the study. This allows the researcher to express their own experiences about the study. One last, but not least, characteristic of qualitative research is that researchers approach the problem in hand in a holistic way by reporting different points of view (Creswell, 2016).

As cited from Flick (2013) above, it is mentioned that there has been a period in qualitative research where the expansion to different fields caused a gap and to close this gap, different techniques have emerged. Qualitative content analysis is one of the new techniques emerged from the development of qualitative research. As a matter of fact, despite being labeled new, qualitative content analysis has a considerable history starting from 1952. Berelson (1952) published his book about content analysis and positioned the method as a quantitative method. In the same year, Kracauer (1952) criticized Berelson's book and declared that content analysis does not have to be quantitative. In fact, Kracauer defines content analysis as more qualitative than quantitative. However, content analysis has been used mostly as a quantitative method until this century. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, methodological studies about qualitative content analysis gained speed. Contributors such as Mayring (2000, 2014) and Schreier (2012) both defined and explained content analysis as a qualitative method.

Having its origin from quantitative research, and being a fairly new technique, qualitative content analysis appears to be contradictory on the account of being whether quantitative or completely qualitative. Since content analysis originated from quantitative research, and only with time, it has been transformed into a qualitative technique, it might not be seen as a qualitative method. In fact, the effects of quantitative approach can be clearly seen in Mayring (2014) and Schreier (2012)'s studies. It is natural for every researcher to have different approaches to a method, especially if it is qualitative research. Unfortunately, there are not any methodological studies found on qualitative content analysis in Turkey; therefore, it is difficult to do a comparative evaluation on this issue. However, this study takes the position of the possibility of being entirely qualitative in content analysis.

As mentioned above, qualitative research is mostly interpretivist, which means it is interested in “how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted” (Mason, 2002). This study positions itself as nominalist and interpretivist in the senses of its ontological and epistemological approaches, respectively. This is because nominalists believe there are different realities in the world, and interpretivism is an epistemological approach of nominalism, which uses observation, interpretation, and reflection as its method (Neuman, 2014). The researcher of this study also believes every individual has their unique reality, therefore, it is difficult to be objective during a research. Thus, different realities of the individuals are tried to understand in this study. As data generation technique, qualitative content analysis is used. The motivation and aims, research questions and the detailed method are explained in the following sections.

### **1.1. Motivation and Aims of the Study**

In this study, the importance of conducting a completely qualitative content analysis is emphasized. When theses which conducted qualitative content analysis are searched on the Thesis Center of Council of Higher Education (CoHE), it is seen that the first examples are published in 2005 and 2006 (CoHE Thesis Center, 2018). It is also seen that the number of theses conducted with qualitative content analysis rose especially this decade. This rising popularity of qualitative content analysis resulted

in curiosity towards the method. Although a popular method, there is a need for methodological studies capturing qualitative content analysis as a whole. Therefore, the motivation of this study is to identify the process and characteristics of qualitative content analysis. The aims of this study are, first, to contribute to the methodology literature in Turkey and, second, to explain how the technique is conducted and, if there is any, to overcome the misunderstandings about it.

Because qualitative content analysis is originated from quantitative research, it is difficult to make a distinction between quantitative and qualitative content analysis. As difficult as it is, it is also important to make these differences between the two techniques clear. If the distinctions between quantitative and qualitative content analyses are not made, then they can get mixed up. The importance to differentiate these two methods constitutes the foundation of this study's other aim which is to offer some pathways about conducting qualitative content analysis for researchers. With this study and these pathways, it is aimed to make qualitative content analysis understood and to help the researchers to overcome the difficulties faced during the process of the method.

## **1.2. Research Question and Sub-questions of the Study**

Research questions in a study are important because they help to embrace certain aspects of the choice of study topic and provide with forming the boundaries of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe that in qualitative studies, research questions should be formed in a way that they allow the researcher to be flexible and free to investigate the topic more deeply. They also depict that research question is a statement which displays what interests the researcher about that topic.

In line with the motivation and aims, this study's main question is formulated as "How is content analysis used in qualitative research techniques?"; and the sub-questions are formulated as:

- "How does quantitative content analysis differ from qualitative content analysis?"

- “How is content analysis conducted in qualitative research techniques?”
- “How is qualitative content analysis conducted in theses since 2010 in Turkey?”

### **1.3. Method of the Study**

First, to answer the first three questions of this study, a literature review is done. This review covered the first examples of content analysis, also of qualitative content analysis, and the recent ones. Upon literature review, the historical development of both quantitative and qualitative content analyses are identified, as well as the debates went on and still going on in the field, the areas it is used, and how to conduct qualitative content analysis. After the literature review, to answer the last research question, a qualitative content analysis is conducted. For this second part of the study, a sample is chosen according to consecutive unit type of purposive sampling. The sample is chosen from the theses in CoHE’s online Thesis Center. Time frame for the sampling is focused on the last decade, because qualitative content analysis is being used more in the recent years. Therefore, the starting point of time is selected as 2010. Forty-two theses are found to be in the frame of sampling. Some of the features of these theses are given in Appendix A. In qualitative research there is not a need for large samples as every item in the sample is analyzed thoroughly in order to understand what it means. At first, analyzing specific fields which first conducted qualitative content analysis, such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology, was the aim of the sample. However, with the search on Thesis Center, it is seen that these fields had very few number of theses conducted with qualitative content analysis. Therefore, all of the theses within the time frame which used qualitative content analysis are included in the sample.

After reaching to the sample, the material is read. This reading focused on the research questions, ontological and epistemological approaches, and the subject of the theses. Then, qualitative content analysis is conducted on all of them. There are two ways to conduct qualitative content analysis: inductive or deductive. In this study, both deductive and inductive qualitative content analyses are used, where first a list is created for the expected codes/themes, then in the analysis stage, there are

codes/themes emerged from the data. Software programs in qualitative research help the researcher to carry out their analysis more practically. Therefore, during the first coding process, MAXQDA is used to organize, manage, and code the data. However, this program could not serve the best to the study's purpose in terms of practicality, so, for the second coding NVivo is chosen for analysis. NVivo is found to be more user-friendly, especially for the organization and categorization stages.

This study is divided into five chapters, starting with Introduction. The second chapter covers, in general, the definition of content analysis. The development of the method as both quantitative and qualitative is explained in three different periods, from its foundation until today. Also in the second chapter the areas content analysis is used in, and how to conduct qualitative content analysis are described. This description is followed by the emerging debates in the method, after a detailed history of content analysis is given. These debates, such as validity and reliability and the differences between quantitative and qualitative content analysis are explained through the literature review. This chapter also constitutes as the theoretical framework of this study, in which the concept is undertaken thoroughly.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology of this study in detail. First, the understanding of qualitative research approach is introduced. Then, concepts of ontology and epistemology are defined, and the ontological and epistemological stances of this study are given. Afterwards, the method of this study is explained in terms of ethical issues, method, data source, and sampling. In Chapter 4, the results of the analysis are given. Finally, Chapter 5 is the discussion and conclusion part where the findings are discussed in terms of research questions. This chapter also consists of this study's aim to contribute to qualitative research, and offers pathways about conducting qualitative content analysis to the researchers who wish to employ this method.





## **CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this chapter, the development of content analysis as a quantitative and qualitative approach will be discussed. This issue is held in three time frames in which the first covers the foundation and first employments of the method. At this point, the areas of use are also mentioned. The second time period focuses mostly on the development and up and coming of the method in both quantitative and qualitative approach. Finally, in the third time frame, a rather new approach to the content analysis, mixed methods, introduced by Mayring is discussed. Besides the foundation and the development of the method, emerging debates are also mentioned. These include reliability and validity issues, whether to focus on manifest or latent meaning, and the advantages and disadvantages of both approaches. Finally, how to conduct qualitative content analysis is explained in detail.

### **2.1. The Foundation of Content Analysis**

Content analysis is one of the qualitative methods. However, it originally comes from quantitative tradition. To give a general definition of the method, Stempel (2003) describes content analysis as something everyone does in their everyday lives, most of the time, maybe without noticing. That is, drawing conclusions from observations (as cited in Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2014). This can be called the simplest and the clearest definition of content analysis. There are other definitions that focus on different aspects of content analysis that were made before Stempel's description. Berelson (1952), one of the pioneers of the method, in his book *Content Analysis in Communication Research*, determined six characteristics of content analysis. He deduced these characteristics from other researchers' definition of content analysis. He stated that the method 1) applies only to social science generalizations; 2) applies only, or mainly, to determine the effects of communications; 3) applies only to the syntactic and semantic dimensions of language; and must be 4) "objective"; 5) "systematic"; and 6) quantitative (original quotations).

Given the time of Berelson, it is understandable that there was an emphasis on being objective and mainly conducting quantitative techniques. In that time,

researchers had a strong positivist approach, and qualitative research techniques were yet to gain power. Even after gaining power in the field of content analysis, there is still vagueness about the criteria for qualitative content analysis. To this day, the effect of quantitative procedures can be still observed.

Even though the method has been popular especially in the last decade, it indeed has a long history. Based on the literature review, the very first examples of content analysis can be traced back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when the Church would use it to do word frequency analyses on Old Testament (as cited in Mayring, 2014). After this century, there are no found writings in the literature about the usage of the method. Then, it is seen that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was used again by the Church for inquisitorial purposes (Krippendorff, 2004). Academics in the field of theology studied newspapers' contents as to see whether the Church's worries about nonreligious materials spreading were accurate. Similarly, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a comparative content analysis was used to check if there were any differences in using certain concepts, like God, Kingdom of Heaven etc. between Lutherans and Pietists (as cited in Mayring, 2014). Also in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Scandinavia, content analysis was used on hymns to find out if there were any nonreligious content (Krippendorff, 2004; as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is understandable that the method was used on the Bible in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when religion was powerful in people's lives. As for the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it can be said that the Reform, which caused Catholicism to be questioned and deemed less powerful than before, had an effect on these studies. Naturally, this made different sects easier to study on. After its religion related past, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the method was used to analyze newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements, and speeches of politicians by academics and other experts in the communication field (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The very first example of systematic content analysis is Speed's (1893) newspaper analysis, in which he categorized the articles and compared the topics (religious, scientific, literary, gossip, scandal, and crime) in different newspapers (Tribune, World, Times, Sun) to see which topics have gained and lost interest (as cited in Mayring, 2014).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century United States, content analysis was used to analyze the content of the newspapers due to a boom in the mass production of newsprint (Krippendorff, 2004). As a matter of fact, the development of mass media and international politics went parallel with the development of content analysis, but it became significant with the “boom” in mass communication (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006).

Also in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the most significant qualitative content analysis procedure, if it is appropriate to call it content analysis, was Sigmund Freud’s dream analyses. There was a conference held in 1955 by the Committee on Linguistics and Psychology of the Social Sciences Research Council at University of Illinois which gave the method new power. In this conference, there were some important developments regarding qualitative content analysis, in which it was said that not only the frequencies were important, but also the meanings of and inferences from the content. It was also said that, other than frequencies, symbol connections are also measurable. Also in this conference quantitative content analysis was criticized and it was proposed that it should be complemented with an approach that does not use frequencies; and the importance of the context was stressed (as cited in Mayring, 2014). In 1966, there was another conference held at the University of Pennsylvania’s Annenberg School of Communication in Philadelphia, which had conclusions on making quantification more accurate, emerging compromise positions in the quantitative-qualitative controversy, and demanding for an explanation of theoretical foundation of content analysis (as cited in Mayring, 2014). With all these developments, content analysis strengthened its place in the field, and found its way into other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, educational science, historical science, and fine art studies (as cited in Mayring, 2014). As for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the method is used on textbooks, newspapers, books, movies, even on paintings (e.g. Messinger, 2012). After all, content analysis can be used on written, verbal or visual communication messages (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). It can be said that the use of content analysis is a cumulative form of previous centuries.

Before going into detail about content analysis, it should be mentioned that although the term “content” was used in the past studies (e.g. Albig, 1938; Dale, 1932; Lasswell, 1942), the term “content analysis” was not used in writing until 1940 by Waples, Berelson, and Bradshaw. However, the method was founded by Harold D. Lasswell and was being conducted before the official term was set. By the year 1942, the term content analysis was being used for some years (e.g. Lasswell, 1941; Leites & Pool, 1942). Over these years, Lasswell, with the studies he carried on, had a major effect on the development of the method, starting with labeling it as “content analysis” (Franzosi, 2008).

## **2.2. Areas of Use and Aims of Content Analysis**

Content analysis was born from communication science; therefore, most of the usages defined are related to the discipline it got its origin from. To start with, Leites and Pool (1942) stated that content analysis can be used 1) to confirm something that is believed, 2) to correct the “optical illusions” of specialists, 3) to resolve arguments among specialists, and 4) to develop and check hypotheses about symbols (as cited in Krippendorff, 2004). They defined a very simple and generalizable usage of content analysis. Janis (1943, 1965), on the other hand, created certain types of content analysis through the classification they use as when to use which type. According to Janis’ classification, there are three types of content analysis: pragmatical content analysis, semantical content analysis, and sign-vehicle analysis. To briefly define, pragmatical content analysis is a classification considering the causes and effects of the content; and semantical content analysis classifies contents considering their meanings. As for sign-vehicle analysis, classification is made considering the psychophysical properties of the content (as cited in Krippendorff, 2004). On the contrary of Leites and Pool (1942), it is evident that Janis (1943, 1965) put more thought on his description of the usage of content analysis and explained in detail. Lasswell (1942) also took a different perspective and listed the symbols that are studied in content analysis, which are: persons, groups, agencies, policies, participations, and ideas (as cited in Kaplan, 1943). Berelson (1952), without a doubt, is one of the few researchers that influenced the field extremely, both for quantitative and qualitative content analysis. In his before-mentioned book, he stated seventeen

uses, which he placed in five sub-headings: Characteristics of content: substance, characteristics of content: form, producers of content, audience of content, and effects of content. First of all, it can be said that, not all, but most of Berelson's areas of use are directly related to communication sciences. He explained in detail in his book that content analysis is used "1) to describe trends in communication content, 2) to track the development of scholarship, 3) to reveal international differences in communication content, 4) to compare media or *levels* of communication, 5) to check communication content against objectives, 6) to construct and apply communication standards, 7) to aid in technical research operations (to code open-ended questions in survey interviews), 8) to expose propaganda techniques, 9) to assess the *readability* of communication materials, 10) to discover stylistic features, 11) to identify the intentions and other characteristics of the communicators, 12) to determine the psychological state of persons or groups, 13) to detect the existence of propaganda (primarily for legal purposes), 14) to secure political and military intelligence, 15) to reflect attitudes, interests, and values (*cultural patterns*) of population groups, 16) to reveal the focus of attention, 17) to describe attitudinal and behavioral responses to communications" (Berelson, 1952; as cited in Krippendorff, 2004). It is clearly seen that although Berelson indicates that content analysis should be quantitative, even he declares that the method is also used to "determine the psychological states of persons" and to reflect the "cultural patterns" of population groups. However, knowing Berelson's approach, perhaps, it would not be wrong to assume that, if he were put into a position to deal with these qualitative natured concepts, he would probably transform these into quantifiable pieces before analyzing them.

Other researchers also defined some uses of content analysis. For instance, Holsti (1969) made a description directly related to communication sciences. He explained that content analysis is used to describe manifest characteristics, and to make inferences about the antecedents and consequences of communication (as cited in Krippendorff, 2004). Another usage was defined recently by Krippendorff (2004), which actually focused on how other researchers use the technique and how they rationalize their inferences. He puts extrapolations, standards, indices and symptoms, linguistic re-presentations, conversations, institutional processes as areas of use of

content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). Actually, Krippendorff merely categorized previous definitions. Stone et al. (1966) looked at the meaning of “area of use” from a different perspective. They simply thought of it as a theoretical concept rather than a practical one and listed the disciplines that use content analysis, which are: psychiatry, psychology, history, anthropology, education, philology and literary analysis, and linguistics (as cited in Krippendorff, 2004).

As for the areas of use of qualitative content analysis, it can be said that with the strength which comes from qualitative research, the method can be used in various areas. It can be stated that qualitative content analysis is composed from atheoretical techniques that enable the researcher to use it in any qualitative inquiry (Forman & Damschroeder, 2008). Schreier (2012) lists the materials which qualitative content analysis can be applied to as: “interview transcripts, transcripts of focus groups, textbooks, company brochures, contracts, diaries, websites, entries on social network sites, television programs, newspaper articles, magazine advertisements, and many more”. If one were to look at it from academic perspective, it is still in use in its origin fields (psychology, sociology, anthropology), and also in nursing research and health sciences.

### **2.3. Periods of Content Analysis**

Before getting into detail about the development of content analysis, it should be clarified that these periods are separated by the researcher according to what seemed important in terms of the evolution of content analysis. It should be mentioned that Mayring (2014) himself made a separation. In his study, the development of content analysis is divided into 4 phases: preliminary, consolidation, fine developments and interdisciplinary expansion, and the present-day situation. In preliminary phase the very start of the content analysis is included until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Consolidation phase consists of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until 1952 when Berelson published his famous book about content analysis. In the third phase, Mayring (2014) mentions two conferences held, and finally the fourth phase consists of 1970s until the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, to suit better with this study, the researcher divided the historical development of content analysis into 3 periods. The first period

starts from its use in more common, approximately from 1940s until the 1950s, in which content analysis is discussed widely. The second period consists of the 1950s, with Berelson's famous book in 1952 and Kracauer's critique of his study in the same year. This period is also important as qualitative content analysis is started to be discussed by the researchers, with the influence of qualitative approach's rising popularity. The last period includes this century we are currently in, where, especially qualitative content analysis is being used more commonly.

### **2.3.1. Foundation to 1950s**

There have been several different definitions of quantitative content analysis, but the difference has been more about the wording than about the meaning. As it can be observed clearly, the mentality of quantitative content analysis has hardly changed in almost seventy years that it had been first found and then used. From the very first definition of the method till the latest one, it is understood that being systematic, objective and quantitative is appreciated above all. Especially in the first decade of content analysis, from 1940s to 1950s, there is a clear tendency towards being systematic, objective, and quantitative. As mentioned before, the only difference is the adding in and extracting out some concepts from the definitions. For example, Waples and Berelson (1941) mentioned the strength of the stimuli (the content) along with being systematic and objective. On the other hand, Leites and Pool (1942), sorted certain requirements to be counted as content analysis. They added referring to syntactic and semantic characteristics of symbols, the referring to be able to be generalized, a high precision when referring to and the references being in social science terminology (as cited in Berelson, 1952). When it is thought that these are one of the very first descriptions of content analysis, they are perfectly detailed and well-thought-of. Other than these, for instance, Kaplan and Goldsen (1949) and Janis (1943), mentioned classification and categorization (as cited in Krippendorff, 2004); whereas Kaplan (1943) referred to content analysis as characterizing the meanings. During these years there was no development of qualitative content analysis.



### 2.3.2. From 1950s to 2000

It is apparent that in the early years of content analysis, researchers have studied thoroughly about the use of content analysis. However, it is interesting that over the years, there were nothing more than some adding to the first definitions. Miller (1951) distinctly put in the reducing phase, which actually just strengthens the quantitative mindset of the method (as cited in Krippendorff, 2004). Cartwright (1953) proposed the terms “content analysis” and “coding” to be used interchangeably (as cited in Markoff, Shapiro & Weitman, 1975). Osgood (1959), Stone et al. (1966) and Holsti (1969), acknowledged that there is a place for inference in the process of the analysis (as cited in Markoff et al., 1975; as cited in Franzosi, 2008; as cited in Stemler, 2001), and Berelson (1971), for the first time, declared his own definition after his book in 1952, and again added something Lasswell thought in the 1940s, that content analysis only deals with manifest content (as cited in Kaplan, 1943; as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006).

After content analysis’ outstanding years, it is clearly seen that the method has lost some interest from researchers. Nevertheless, it continued to receive high level interest from some of them. Kerlinger (1973), for example, argued that the attention given to manifest content does not necessarily let the researcher to ignore the latent meanings. He fully agrees with Berelson’s definition, but also says that most content analysis has restricted itself to quantifications and neglected the important theoretical concepts. Then he added that content analysis should be considered “a method of observation” (as cited in Riffe et al., 2014). Kerlinger’s criticism is indeed strong and truthful. While Kerlinger certainly defines his approach as quantitative, he thinks that the things that do not appear in text, reading between the lines is as important as doing frequency analysis on a given content. Another contribution was made by Krippendorff (1980), in which he defined content analysis as a technique that allows the researchers to make valid and replicable inferences from data in their context (as cited in Franzosi, 2008; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Leaving behind almost forty years since the method was first described, and Krippendorff’s definition is the first to mention the context. Although Krippendorff appreciated the qualitative aspect of quantitative content analysis, his ideas didn’t quite catch the attention of his peers. Similar to their

antecedents, Starosta (1984), Gerbner (1985), Shapiro and Markoff (1997), Titscher (2000), and Nachmias and Nachmias (2000) defined content analysis as an objective, systematic, reductive and quantitative technique (as cited in Altheide, 1987; as cited in Krippendorff, 2004; as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006; as cited in Demirci & Köseli, 2014). Cole (1988), on the other hand, explained content analysis as a method of “analyzing written, verbal or visual communication messages” (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In addition, Weber (1990), stated that content analysis is a systematic method that used to “make valid inferences from text” (as cited in Riffe et al., 2014); whereas Cavanagh (1997) described it as “a flexible method for analyzing text data” (as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

After quantitative content analysis’ brightest years, with the developments in qualitative research, qualitative content analysis has emerged as an alternative to its quantitative counterpart. Even if qualitative content analysis’ background roots back to almost the same time as quantitative, it has not gotten proper attention. If one were to define qualitative content analysis as simple as it can be, then Moretti and his colleagues’ (2011) definition would be the best fit: “Content analysis allows researchers to interpret subjective data in a scientific manner”. This definition is important as it emphasizes that qualitative content analysis is indeed scientific. This issue has always been argued about qualitative procedures, and content analysis had its share of it. To start, it is best to do it with a researcher that had influenced the field the most: Berelson. In his book, Berelson (1952) also made a description of qualitative content analysis. However, this definition seems somewhat biased. Berelson gave the method enough value to create a chapter solely on it, but he also named the chapter as “‘Qualitative’ Content Analysis.” The quotation marks draw attention, however, it is not this study’s concern as claiming a reason would be a discourse analysis. Berelson explained qualitative content analysis as rough forms of quantitative statements, that it utilizes more impressionistic methods. Berelson also specified that qualitative analysis is based upon presence-absence of content, is done on small or incomplete samples, focuses on the intentions of the communicator or its effects on the audience, employs less formalized categorization, and is concerned with content as a “reflection” of a “deeper” phenomena (Berelson, 1952). He finally stated that, because

of all these features of qualitative content analysis, it should not be called as content analysis but rather should be named “content assessment.” After seeing his suggestion, maybe it can be inferred that this is why he used quotation marks for the chapter’s name, because he saw qualitative content analysis as an assessment, not an analysis.

Naturally, criticisms arose. This is why Berelson is kept calling an influencer. As mentioned above, in the very same year, Kracauer (1952) published an article titled “The Challenge of Qualitative Content Analysis.” In this article, he addressed Berelson’s claims against qualitative content analysis. Kracauer stated that there is a one sided reliance on quantitative content analysis, and this causes neglecting of qualitative aspects, thus reducing the accuracy of analysis. Another defense of his is that the assumptions of quantitative analysis inhibit the important role which qualitative considerations may play. Because of this, Kracauer says that there is a need for theoretical re-orientation from quantitative to qualitative. And as a result of a re-orientation, only then the capacity of communications research can be developed. However, Kracauer was an advocate for qualitative content analysis, he, as mentioned above, also had some confusion about what qualitative content analysis really was. Kracauer believed quantitative analysis also consists of qualitative features, but qualitative analysis, too, generally need quantification to reach an exhaustive employment. This reminds the ongoing debate that, for qualitative analysis to be valid, it needs to carry out quantitative procedures. But in reality, because quantitative and qualitative analyses have their origin from different approaches, it is natural for them to have separate procedures and analyses. Kracauer (1952), fortunately, acknowledged this fact saying that they differ as qualitative analysis can achieve its analysis without having to use frequencies (or quantification). He added that the only important thing in qualitative analysis is creating such categories that these are able to summarize the meaning of a text. Kracauer made this addition indicating that qualitative analysis also uses hypotheses. This, again, gives rise to think that there was confusion about qualitative analysis. Then, he specifies another difference with quantitative techniques, which is that qualitative analysis is impressionistic, which gives it an advantage against quantitative analysis. He explains that because of its

impressionistic aspect, qualitative analysis is able to reach an accuracy that quantitative techniques cannot even “hope to achieve.” It is clear that, even though there are some concepts for Kracauer that need to be enlightened, he is promoting a qualitative approach for content analysis. And, he deserves the credit for drawing attention to another method that can be conducted while doing content research.

Maybe it can be said that Kracauer had started a criticism chain after his article, and he definitely helped qualitative content analysis to be developed. For example, Seltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch and Cook (1959) mentioned that incidental limitations could be caused by reducing intensive content analysis to numerical forms and disregarding all types of communication that cannot be expressed numerically (e.g., definitions, symbols, elaborate explanations, photographs etc.) (as cited in Berg & Lune, 2015). Although not all of the objections address Berelson directly like Kracauer, it is apparent that the method had started to be discussed. Ritsert (1972) also criticized quantitative content analysis by saying that there are four aspects not taken into account appropriately by it, which are 1) the context of text, 2) latent structures, 3) distinctive individual cases, and 4) things that do not appear in the text (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006). As it is seen, Ritsert actually mentioned latent-related content twice in his criticism, emphasizing the importance of considering meanings that are hidden in the text. Mayring (2000), on the other hand, stated that quantitative content analysis is superficial and that it does not respect latent contents and contexts, and that it only works with simplifying quantification (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006). As for qualitative content analysis, Mayring (2000) defined it as an analysis approach that is empirical and methodologically controlled, that considers the context of communication, without trying to do calculations (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006). Although Mayring (2003) made a sharp criticism about quantitative content analysis, still, he thinks that there are some aspects of it that qualitative content analysis should also keep (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006). These aspects are: fitting the material into a model of communication –deciding on which part the references should be made (communicator, the situation, sociocultural background, text itself, or the effect of the message); systematic, rule-based analysis –following a rule procedure, analyzing step by step; categories being in the center of the analysis; subject-reference rather than

technique –the connection made with the subject of analysis; pilot study; theory-guided analysis –to balance the technical “fuzziness” of qualitative procedures; inclusion of quantitative steps of analysis; and reliability and validity. Mayring’s view of qualitative content analysis is somewhat different. As it can be seen from his description of content analysis, he believes that there can be a space for triangulation<sup>1</sup> in the method (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006). This may be understood from the list of quantitative aspects that he thinks qualitative analysis should keep.

These are the main criticisms which were expressed after Berelson’s book. Here, some definitions of qualitative content analysis, aside from the ones that already mentioned, will be given. The history of qualitative content analysis started with Kracauer, who only defended the method against its quantitative counterpart. Although it is said that qualitative content analysis was first developed in anthropology, psychology and sociology (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016), or in literary theory, the social sciences (symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology), and critical scholarship (Marxist approaches, British cultural studies, feminist theory) (Krippendorff, 2004), almost a decade later than Kracauer, the method entered into linguistics, psychology, sociology, history, arts, etc. (as cited in Mayring, 2000). In this decade, there were some quantitative related advances, too. For example, Pool (1959) published an article titled “Trends in Content Analysis”; while Gerbner, Holsti, Krippendorff, Paisley and Stone (1969) published a book titled *The Analysis of Communication Content*. In the 1970s, besides Ritsert, Becker and Lissmann (1973) have also emphasized the latent content much like their antecedents. They have differentiated levels of content: “themes and main ideas of the text as primary content; context information as latent content” (as cited in Mayring, 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> Triangulation is a term used in social sciences to explain the use of multiple methods and measures for a certain phenomenon. The assumption of this technique is to develop a more effective method and a more accurate analysis. Its premise is that the weaknesses of each method used will be made up for by its counter-method (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006). It is also said that the goal of triangulation is to decrease researcher bias and the possibility to misinterpret (Cho & Lee, 2014).

### **2.3.3. Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Finally, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, unfortunately, there were still not big changes to the definition of quantitative content analysis. The only change was again the wording of a certain concept. Pope et al. (2006) and Gbrich (2007) defined content analysis as a systematic and unobtrusive method that uses coding and categorization on large amounts of texts to understand the trends and patterns of the used words, their frequencies, relationships and structures (as cited in Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). Stone et al. (1966) and Holsti (1969) had used the term “inference.” Much like them, Riffe et al. (2014) also used the word “inference” in their definition of content analysis, and mentioned the context similar to Krippendorff, but they strictly stuck to quantitative approach. They put the emphasis on assigning numerical values and using statistical methods. On the other hand, Morse and Richards (2002), Neuendorf (2002), Leedy and Ormrod (2005), Bogdan and Biklen (2006), Maxfield and Babbie (2006), and Berg and Latin (2008) preferred to use “interpretation” (as cited in Berg & Lune, 2015). However, this word choice may be related to qualitative techniques being on the rise at the time. Interpretation, perhaps, connotes a deeper understanding of the content in hand while inference gives, somehow, a shallower remark about it. To summarize the description of content analysis, maybe Bloor and Wood (2006)’s is the most explicative: “The purpose of content analysis is to describe the characteristics of the document’s content by examining who says what, to whom, and with what effect” (as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Quantitative aspect of content analysis was seen as a distinctive characteristic, and the method was identified with the aim to classify content in numerical terms which are precise, and do not indicate subjective judgments (Kaplan & Goldsen, 1949). In contrast with this, according to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), at first, content analysis was used as a qualitative or a quantitative method of analysis (as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), but later on, it had started to be used mainly as a quantitative method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). At this point, an objection could be made to Hsieh and Shannon (2005)’s claim that content analysis was used either as qualitative or quantitative at first. When looked at the literature, it is seen that most of the studies were conducted using quantitative content analysis (e.g. Lasswell, 1941; Leites &

Pool, 1942; Berelson, 1952; Kaplan, 1943). In fact, when Kracauer (1952) published his article titled “The Challenge of Qualitative Content Analysis” right after Berelson’s book, he was one of the first researchers to describe qualitative content analysis. And even he believes that qualitative analysis “often requires quantification” to reach a comprehensive result (Kracauer, 1952). It is clear that there is a gap that needed to be filled, and it is understandable that Kracauer, at some points in his article, may have had confusion about the use of qualitative techniques because being qualitative was new to the field, and there may still have been some dark parts that needed to be enlightened. Moreover, it can be seen from recent studies, that there is still some confusion about how to do qualitative content analysis. It will be discussed in detail later on.

As for qualitative content analysis, there seems to be a gap in the literature between the 1970s and 2000s that draws attention. However, this does not mean that the method had stopped its development. In 2002, Patton made a definition of qualitative content analysis which is: “Any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). It is apparent that even after fifty years of the method, it is proper to say that there is still confusion. For instance, Patton talked about data “reduction”, which is clearly a word that suits the quantitative approach better.

Mayring has been briefly mentioned and will continue to be mentioned, because he is an important qualitative content analyst. Mayring (2003) defined qualitative content analysis as a method which is a systematic and rule-guided classification and description of texts, regarding their latent meanings and also contexts (as cited in Burla et al., 2008). Bryman (2004) described it as an approach that emphasizes the role of the researcher in constructing the meaning of texts. Mayring, rather like most qualitative content analysts, also considered the context of contents. One thing differs with Bryman, and that is, he mentioned categories emerging out of data (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006). It can be said that he gives credit to the qualitative researcher, in which he emphasizes the importance of the researcher

in constructing the meanings in a research, and, again, treating the content as a live entity. To go back to a quantitative content analyst, Krippendorff (2004) explained some characteristics that qualitative analyses share. He said that qualitative approach requires a close reading of comparably small amounts of texts, involves interpretation of texts into new descriptions that are sometimes against the positivist approach, and that the researchers actively get involved with the texts as part of their mentality. As a matter of fact, Krippendorff's views on quantitative-qualitative distinction are rather different from other quantitative researchers. This will also be discussed in the oncoming sections.

There have been several different approaches to qualitative content analysis. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) defined it as a research method which systematically classifies data with coding and identifying themes for subjectively interpreting the content, while Forman and Damschroeder (2008) described what qualitative content analysis does is to examine data which are collected in detail and in depth with open-ended techniques, without an attention paid to measurement. On the other hand, Schreier (2012) explained qualitative content analysis as “a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material”. It can be noticed that qualitative content analysis has been also defined as systematic, organized, scientific as much as quantitative content analysis. This approach is mostly related with the mindsets of the researchers. It is seen that some qualitative content analysts also had some confusion about its fundamentals. This is why there is still a debate going between qualitative and quantitative approaches in general.

At this point, a recent approach to content analysis by Philipp Mayring should be mentioned. It can be said that in reality qualitative and quantitative approaches are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they can both be used in the same research. Qualitative analysis works with the contents and their “antecedent-consequent pattern”, and quantitative analysis works with the continuation and frequency of the contents (as cited in Franzosi, 2008). It is possible to say that they may complement each other when used in the same design. To emphasize this, Weber (1990) concluded that the best content analysis is the one that uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches



(as cited in Franzosi, 2008). On this note, it is appropriate to look at a mixed methods approach to content analysis.

As mentioned earlier, Mayring (2014) has a new method suggestion to content analysis, and that is mixed methods, or a multi-method, content analysis. This is also called “triangulation” by some researchers (e.g. Kohlbacher, 2006; Flick, 1992; Jick, 1979). To recall, Mayring thinks that qualitative content analysis should use some of the quantitative content analysis’ aspects that can make it stronger. Seemingly, it has not led to a development of a new method yet, but it can be said that Mayring just gave a brief description. It seems that this model includes different steps from both approaches. As it has been stated by Gillham (2000): “Different methods have different strengths and weaknesses. If they converge, then we can be reasonably confident that we are getting the true picture” (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006). It is seen that using both methods have the goal of combining the strengths of each one in the central. This is further supported by Jick (1979), who stated that the effect of triangulation is based on the fact that the weak aspects of each method are “compensated by the counter-balancing strengths of another”. To add to this, Flick (1992) argued that for triangulation, each method should follow its own criteria (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006).

Mayring (2014) proposed three mixed procedures that can be used in content analysis. These are content structuring/theme analysis, type-building content analysis, and parallel procedures. In content structuring, the first step is deductive, which means there is a list of themes pre-developed from previous research and theories. After assigning categories deductively, a coding protocol is created, and the data is coded according to this. The second step is deriving and then summarizing the data according to categories. If there is a big amount of data in each category, then inductive category formation is more appropriate for it. Type-building content analysis’ main concept is to take a heterogeneous “chunk” of data and classifying and describing them. This procedure proceeds as: “definition of the dimension(s) of type-building, definition of the logic of typology (extreme types, frequent types, theoretically interesting types), inductive category development with these two

aspects as category definition, revision of the inductive categories (types) and determine the ultimate typology, choosing representatives for the types, describing those types by summarizing qualitative content analysis or inductive category formation” (Mayring, 2014). The last one Mayring mentions, parallel procedures, assumes that inductive and deductive analysis can be implemented at the same time in a research. Mayring (2014) argues that this very aspect of qualitative content analysis is what makes big amounts of data workable.

## **2.4. Emerging Debates in the Field**

In this section some recent debates in the field of content analysis are mentioned. First, a rather important discussion about qualitative content analysis is handled. Reliability and validity is crucial for quantitative studies, and a considerable amount of researchers in the field of qualitative research try to implement these into the approach. Another aspect which naturally calls for a discussion is the advantages and disadvantages of content analysis. This issue is mentioned next. Thirdly, a fundamental debate is handled, which is the ongoing debate between quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Finally, a never-ending debate, whether to analyze manifest or latent content, is mentioned.

### **2.4.1. Reaching trustworthiness in content analysis**

Reliability and validity are much debated issues in qualitative research. Joppe (2000) defines reliability as the consistency of the results and the accuracy of the representation of the population, and validity as the determining factor of the trueness of the measurement (as cited in Golafshani, 2003). The reliability is checked with the consistency over time, and validity is checked with if the instrument used in the study measures what it should measure.

It is said that qualitative approaches lack rigor the quantitative methods have (as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Naturally, this debate is current in qualitative content analysis, too. In quantitative content analysis, for example, inter-coder reliability is assessed with Cohen’s *kappa* or, Pearson’s *r*. Some researchers try to implement this in qualitative analysis, but there are different issues regarding the

reliability and validity of a qualitative content analysis. And because the method used in qualitative analyses are different from the one used in quantitative analyses, surely, the reliability and validity criteria should be different, too (as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). For instance, some researchers refer to it as trustworthiness, or credibility, or transferability (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Elo et al., 2014; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016).

First, researchers who prefer to use quantitative measurements to check the reliability and validity of content analysis will be discussed. Stemler (2001) and Burla et al. (2008) approached this issue with a strong quantitative tendency. Consistency in coding is said to be particularly important when qualitative data are quantified (as cited in Burla et al., 2008). Inter-coder reliability in qualitative and quantitative content analysis is given with a table in Burla et al. (2008)'s study (Table 2.1).

When using multiple coders in a study, for it to be reliable, there needs to be a set of specific recording instructions. This way, outside coders can be trained to reach the reliability that is wished. Reliability has two aspects: stability, and reproducibility. Stability is the intra-rater reliability, which means if the coder is consistent in his/her coding process. Reproducibility refers to inter-rater reliability, which means if different coders code the text similarly, or measuring the coding schemes' usefulness. One addition is that to reach the consistency with coders in the coding process, inter-coder reliability should be calculated (Burla et al., 2008). This way, subjective bias is decreased.

**Table 2.1. Inter-coder Reliability in Content Analysis**

	<b>Qualitative content analysis</b>	<b>Quantitative content analysis</b>
<b>Goals and key features</b>	-Systematic and rule-guided classification and definition of text material -Qualitative and quantitative display of results -Focusing on manifest and latent contents; inductive category development	-Systematic and quantitative description of text data -Testing of hypotheses by statistical inference -Addressing the manifest contents -Mainly deductive category application.
<b>Appropriateness of inter-coder reliability analysis</b>	-Valid instrument for quality assurance -Can help to identify weaknesses in the coding process -May enhance clarity in coding system	-Standard measure of research quality -High ICR values are essential for statistical analysis and hypothesis testing

Source: Burla et al., 2008.<sup>1</sup>

As for validity, Stemler (2001) suggests using triangulation, because inference is used in qualitative research. In triangulation, multiple sources of data, methods, or theories are used to reach the credibility (as cited in Stemler, 2001). Shapiro and Markoff (1997) argue that content analysis is valid and meaningful if only its results are based on other measures (as cited in Stemler, 2001).

Besides these, there are not many different approaches to evaluate a qualitative content analysis' reliability and validity. Most of the researchers (Elo et al., 2014; Cho & Lee, 2014; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016) prefer to use Guba (1981)'s and Lincoln and Guba (1985)'s criteria. These are specified as credibility, transferability, dependability (as cited in Cho & Lee, 2014), and conformability (as cited in Elo et al., 2014; as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). In a wide description, these criteria form "trustworthiness" (as cited in Elo et al., 2014).

Credibility stands for the accurate definition and representation of the constructions of the study (as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016; Elo et al., 2014). The findings should also be well covered with the categories generated (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). To reach a better credibility in a study, researchers should clearly explain their coding and analyzing processes (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). Triangulation, showing representative quotations, peer debriefing are other ways to

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<sup>1</sup> Written permission of the authors was obtained.

improve the credibility of the results. Triangulation decreases the researcher bias and misunderstandings (Cho & Lee, 2014).

Transferability simply means to be able to make comparisons between studies (Elo et al., 2014; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). For this, researchers should give detailed and clear descriptions of the phenomenon, the context, participants, data collection and analysis process (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; as cited in Cho & Lee, 2014).

Dependability refers to the coherent feature of the data over time under different conditions (Elo et al., 2014; as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). This can be improved by using an audit trail of the research process that contains of all records, notes about methodology, and documents produced (Cho & Lee, 2014). Conformability is the meaning the data reflects, which is understood as the same by different people (Elo et al., 2014; as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016).

In 1994, Lincoln and Guba added another criterion to evaluate the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. This criterion is authenticity, which is, the spectrum of realities shown by the researcher to the readers (as cited in Elo et al., 2014). However, Elo and Kyngäs (2008) warn that if there are more authentic citations than the actual text, this may mean that the analysis is not done yet.

Overall, to enhance the reliability of a study, along with the criteria, the researcher should show a connection between the data and the results (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Mayring (2003) discusses these issues according to Krippendorff (2004)'s definitions (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006). He differentiated validity as material-, result-, and process-oriented. Material-oriented validity involves semantic (meaning reconstruction of the material) and sampling validity (the criteria for accurate sampling), result-oriented validity involves correlative (correlation with an external criterion) and predictive validity (is used only when the predictions are derived from the data), and process-oriented validity involves construct validity (previous success with similar constructs such as theories or models). Then, he differentiated reliability

as stability (the results being the same on recurrent studies), reproducibility (reaching to the same results under different conditions), and accuracy (the analysis reaching a standard) (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006).

Mayring (2003) added another criterion: communicative validation, which stands for reaching to a common agreement and harmony between the researchers and the researched (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006).

Although some researchers both from quantitative and qualitative approaches believe and advocate a set of criteria to assess the reliability and validity of qualitative content analysis, this research's stance does not hold this thought. It is believed that such terms as "reliability" and "validity" cannot be applied to qualitative research due to its very nature. These two criteria assume a comparison that comes from objectivity, whereas qualitative research is grounded in a subjective root. Hence, a comparison is nearly impossible to make in qualitative research, making it nearly impossible to apply reliability and validity. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, qualitative content analysis also needs some kind of a "validation" in order to get the respect it needs in terms of doing science. Therefore, the term "trustworthiness" is accepted in this study.

#### **2.4.2. Quantitative content analysis vs. qualitative content analysis**

The inception of quantitative-qualitative debate can be marked to when Snow (1959) identified two cultures in science (as cited in Mayring, 2014). On one side, there is a rigid positivistic approach that mostly uses quantitative techniques, and on the other side, there are explorative, descriptive and interpretive methods used by qualitative research. Mayring (2014) argues that two factors made this debate deepen even more. First is the newly found requirement of randomized controlled trials. This approach has attracted attention in social sciences. This advance caused Denzin (2010) to write an article that can be considered a "qualitative manifesto" in which he strongly defended qualitative research techniques (as cited in Mayring, 2014). Nowadays, the possibility of a third approach, mixed methods, is being discussed. Both techniques have fundamentally different roots, and opposing to each other at certain points is natural.

Zhang and Wildemuth (2016) argue that content analysis method can be best understood by comparing qualitative and quantitative approaches to it. First of all, the origins of both methods are different. Quantitative content analysis has its root in communication sciences where it is mostly used to count specific manifest content of the text, which is criticized for it failing to extract the meanings of it (as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). In contrast, qualitative content analysis was born from anthropology, sociology, and psychology where it is used to understand the meanings of the content. Secondly, quantitative content analysis uses deductive approach to test hypotheses or theories; whereas qualitative content analysis mainly uses inductive approach to examine the themes and inferences drawn from them, and sometimes it tries to generate a theory. Thirdly, quantitative content analysis uses mostly probability samples, while qualitative content analysis generally uses purposive samples. And lastly, what they produce is different. Quantitative approach generally produces numbers that comes from statistical procedures. On the other hand, qualitative approach produces descriptions along with reflections of the subjects about the social world. One advantage of qualitative content analysis is that it gives attention to unique themes that show the spectrum of the meanings of the phenomenon rather than the statistical significance of the texts or concepts (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016).

In the case of content analysis, two approaches can be differentiated: hermeneutical, and positivist approach. Hermeneutical approach accepts the constructivist theory and tries to infer meanings from the text as an interaction between the assumptions of the reader and the motives of the communicator. In contrast, the positivist approach tries to simply quantify the manifest meanings in the text. The social constructivist theory assumes that it is possible to come to an accord between different meaning constructions and it allows generating a mutual (quasi-)objective reality. That is why; hermeneutical approaches attempt to develop rules for interpretation (Mayring, 2014). Mayring (2014) argues that this enhances objectivity in qualitative research. On the other hand, positivistic approaches had changed form to become post-positivism or critical rationalism over time. They, much like positivism, also try to falsify hypotheses, and aims to reach a true reality, not a copy of it (Mayring, 2014). Over the years the difference between qualitative and

quantitative content analysis had become wider. Some specialized new approaches to content analysis have emerged such as discourse analysis, narrative analysis, semiotics etc. (Franzosi, 2008). That is why; George (1949) argues that under certain circumstances, content analyses that do not contain frequency analyses are better at explaining the socio-historical reality than the analyses that contain frequencies (as cited in Franzosi, 2008).

As mentioned before, Mayring (2014) has a different approach to qualitative content analysis, and this has an influence on almost every aspect of the research. He thinks that during the research process, it is possible to follow different paradigms in different points. In social sciences, an acceptable research should indicate the importance of the research question and the possible outcomes (Mayring, 2014).

Much like Mayring's thoughts about qualitative analysis keeping some aspects of quantitative; Krippendorff (2004) believed there are some points where quantitative analysis becomes weak. He gives his example from political information; nevertheless, he argues that quantitative analyses sometimes might not provide the best conclusions. When this is a concern, the researcher can resort to qualitative analysis to compensate the existent gap. Being a quantitative content analyst, Krippendorff sure gives respect to qualitative content analysis. He believes qualitative analyses can be systematic, reliable, and valid as well.

In his book *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*, Krippendorff (2004) states that there is a misunderstood dichotomization between qualitative and quantitative content analysis. He sees both of them as two kinds of justifications of the designs. On one side, there is the explicitness and objectivity and on the other side there are context-related appropriate procedures, which both of them is very necessary. He explains that both qualitative and quantitative content analysts are criticized because of each method's shortcomings. Quantitative approach is criticized as it uses the measurements of natural sciences, and restricts content analysis to quantification, whereas qualitative approach is criticized because it is unsystematic and its interpretations are highly impressionistic. However, qualitative analysts defended their approach as every unit analyzed is unique and is open to multiple



interpretations and it should be acted upon according to these features (Krippendorff, 2004). Eventually, Krippendorff (2004) tried to solve this debate with indicating that, in reality, both approaches use sampling, choose unit of analysis, use examples or quotations to fit the material into the context.

One particular difference between qualitative and quantitative content analysis is that qualitative content analysis does not specify a line between data collection and analysis. These proceed side by side, at the same time (Franzosi, 2008). On the other hand, naturally, quantitative content analysis has very rigid lines. It is seen as a data collection method, and the coders and the researcher(s) doing the analysis should be different people. Coders cannot analyze the material (as cited in Franzosi, 2008). Franzosi (2008) also accepts content analysis as a data collection method, but with one side note: it is “a technique of measurement applied to text” (as cited in Franzosi, 2008).

Content analysis has its own upsides and downsides as is every method. The advantages and disadvantages of content analysis can be divided for its quantitative and qualitative parts (Table 2.2). There are some quantitative related criticisms to qualitative content analysis, however, in this study these will be classified under the advantages or disadvantages of qualitative content analysis.

**Table 2.2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis**

	<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>
<b>Advantages</b>	<p>Stemler (2001):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A powerful tool for determining authorship.</li> <li>- Useful for examining trends and patterns in documents.</li> <li>- Powerful data reduction technique.</li> </ul> <p>Neuman (2014):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lets the researcher reveal the content in a source of communication.</li> <li>- Useful for three types of research problems:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Problems involving a large volume of text.</li> <li>2. When a topic must be studied 'at a distance'.</li> <li>3. It can reveal messages in a text that are difficult to see with casual observation.</li> </ol> </li> </ul> <p>Moen (1990):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is nonreactive (i.e., the person being studied is not aware he or she is being studied)</li> <li>- Allows "access" to inaccessible participants.</li> <li>- Lends itself to longitudinal –over time- studies (as cited in Riffe et al., 2014).</li> </ul>	<p>Altheide (1987):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allows researchers to interpret subjective data in a scientific manner.</li> </ul> <p>Kondracki et al. (2002):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If the main data sources are written text, it is an unobtrusive method because unwanted interaction effects do not occur between participants and researchers (as cited in Cho &amp; Lee, 2014).</li> </ul> <p>Kohlbacher (2006):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Methodologically strictly controlled</li> <li>- The material is analyzed in a step-by-step process</li> <li>- Takes an all-inclusive approach towards analyzing data material and achieves to (almost) completely grasp and cover the complexity of the social situations examined.</li> </ul> <p>Schreier (2012):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is flexible in that the data can be verbal or visual and it can be collected by the researcher or it can be sampled from different sources (as cited in Cho &amp; Lee, 2014).</li> </ul> <p>Vaismoradi et al. (2013):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is suitable for researchers who wish to use a relatively low degree of interpretation.</li> </ul> <p>Cho and Lee (2014):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It leads to understanding of social reality or phenomena through interpretation of a collection of written or unwritten documented communication materials.</li> <li>- It allows the researcher to process big amounts of data.</li> <li>- Flexibility of using inductive or deductive approaches or a combination of both in the analysis process.</li> <li>- The ability to derive manifest and latent content meaning.</li> </ul> <p>Mayring (2014):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In comparison to those text analytical approaches, [it] seems to be the most extensive (depicting a wide set of different conducts) and the most exact one (determining clear step-by-step models and analytical rules).</li> </ul>

**Table 2.2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis (continued)**

<b>Disadvantages</b>	<p>Markoff et al. (1975):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is confusion, disagreement misconceptions, and both false and true dilemmas in the literature.</li> <li>- The field has become dominated by a fully automated approach that excludes the human coders.</li> </ul> <p>Polit and Beck (2004):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does not carry out in a straight line and is more complex than quantitative analysis because it is less regulated and formulaic (as cited in Elo &amp; Kyngäs, 2008).</li> </ul> <p>Elo and Kyngäs (2008):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very flexible and there is no simple, “right” way of doing it.</li> <li>- The analysis process has been little discussed in literature.</li> </ul> <p>Moretti et al. (2011):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a risk of research bias caused by the researcher “interpreting”</li> <li>- Lack of reproducibility</li> <li>- The unfeasibility to separate individuals and group opinions with the risk to level or to overestimate participants’ contributions and the consequent lack in generalizability when the group is considered the only unit of analysis.</li> </ul> <p>Riffe et al. (2014):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The method puts too much importance on comparative frequency of various symbols’ presence.</li> </ul>	<p>Kondracki et al. (2002):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It can need too much work and time, and the coding scheme becomes, to a certain extent, complex (as cited in Cho &amp; Lee, 2014).</li> </ul> <p>Mayring (2000):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less appropriate if the research question is highly open-ended, explorative, variable and working with categories would be a constraint, or if a more holistic, not step-by-step ongoing of analysis is planned.</li> </ul> <p>Gläser and Laudel (1999, 2004):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It can only be used if the text itself is not the subject of examination (as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006).</li> </ul> <p>Ehnert (2008):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It may not be suitable for open explorative research (as cited in Elo &amp; Kyngäs, 2008).</li> </ul> <p>Elo and Kyngäs (2008):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The analysis process has been little discussed in literature.</li> </ul> <p>Vaismoradi et al. (2013):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lacks the scientific rigour and credibility.</li> </ul> <p>Cho &amp; Lee (2014):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Because of a lack of identified analysis procedure, researchers who just begun researching, experience confusion in conducting their research.</li> </ul>
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Quantitative content analysis has many advantages and disadvantages. However, these are not discussed by the researchers very often. And if some researchers pointed out some of the aspects of it, still, it is not thorough and detailed. It can be said that there is sort of a consensus on the need of discussion about the procedure in the literature. In addition to this, Riffe et al. (2014) conveyed that even though some researchers put too much emphasis on frequencies of different content, some also argued that sometimes the presence of a certain symbol might be very important for the effect of the message.

At first look, it might look like that qualitative content analysis has few disadvantages, and maybe it actually has, but this is most probably because of, as mentioned with quantitative content analysis, the need of research done in this area.

#### **2.4.3. Analyzing manifest vs. latent content in content analysis**

One other aspect of content analysis that has caused much debate in the field is whether to consider the latent or manifest meaning, or both. Lasswell (1941), as one of the founders of the method, had a resolute opinion for latent meaning. He argued that speaking of latent meaning is to predict something, an interpretation. Kaplan (1943) added to Lasswell's explanation by saying that content analysis is an analysis of manifest content, not latent. Berelson (1952) suggests that one of the assumptions of content analysis is that studying manifest content is meaningful. Accordingly, the analyst assumes that the meanings s/he ascribes to the content are the same meanings as the communicator meant and/or the audience understood. But he argues that this is almost impossible as once a meaning is connected with a "symbol" (whether it is a word, sentence, etc.), reader's own perception become involved with it. Therefore, it is not a given that the reader will understand the exact same meaning as what communicator intended. Berelson (1952) believes, to solve this, it is best for content analysis to study with the meanings that are more denotative than connotative. Osgood (1959), too, shares a similar thought in which he says that inferences are made from evidence in the messages (as cited in Markoff et al., 1975). Markoff et al. (1975), also acknowledged that researchers are divided into two camps. Some of them are on the side with Berelson, considering manifest contents, and the others are considering

latent meaning in their research. They also pointed that the “latent content” group does not consider any analysis worthwhile whose categories are close to the original intent of the message. Markoff et al. (1975) state that studies with apparent conclusions are discontent. Carley (1993), in contrast, argues that content analysis does not work well when it comes to extracting the implicit information from text; furthermore, Carley (1993) is pessimistic that no solution can be found in the extent of content analysis.

To go back to Markoff et al. (1975), they also think that this latent-manifest debate is a problem of validity. Similarly, Riffe et al. (2014), also, think that this debate is related with reliability and validity; although this issue is explained later. Riffe et al. (2014) declare that reliability is achieved the easiest when the content under analysis is more manifest, but they also argue that the most manifest content is not always the most significant to a study. Content is almost never limited to only manifest or latent, and for that reason, content analysis may also focus on some degree of latent meaning. They explain that this may cause two problems. First one is, since inter-coder reliability is deemed important in quantitative content analysis, the decrease of coder agreement due to the increase of latent meaning. Another problem that can emerge is actually the one Berelson addressed in his book, which is the uncertainty of the derived meanings from content by the communicator and the receiver. And relating with validity, they argued that studies analyzing latent content assume that the most important characteristics of communication cannot be captured through quantitative procedures. In the end, the interpretation that fits best depends on the researcher. And they also point out that it is never argued whether the researcher is competent enough to make these judgments when interpreting latent content.

Elo and Kyngäs (2008) explained that the researcher should decide if s/he will analyze the latent or manifest content. When analyzing latent content, if the content being analyzed is a transcription from a kind of an interview, silences, sighs, laughter, etc. should also be taken into account. Robson (1993) took a different approach and stated that researchers can choose whether to use latent or manifest content according to their goal and research question (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

In trying to settle this debate, it can be clearly said that whether to analyze manifest or latent content mostly depends on the approach and questions of a research. So, it all comes to the researcher's own interest for his/her study.

## **2.5. How to Conduct Qualitative Content Analysis**

Before going into the details of the analysis process, here, types of category formation will be explained. There are three approaches identified in the literature: inductive, deductive, and abductive. Abductive approach is a contribution of Krippendorff (2004) to content analysis. Inductive and deductive category formations are the conventional ones. First of all, which of the approaches will be used is related to the objective of the study (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Basically, inductive approach is used when there is little knowledge about the topic in hand, and categories are created from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Forman & Damschroeder, 2008; Moretti et al., 2011; as cited in Cho & Lee, 2014; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016); deductive approach is used when there is enough knowledge to build a structure of analysis and the goal of the study is to test theories (Spannagel, Gläser-Zikuda, & Schroeder, 2005; as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Forman & Damschroeder, 2008; Moretti et al., 2011; as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2013; Cho & Lee, 2014; as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). Also, inductive approach works from specific to general, and in contrast, deductive approach works from general (theory) to specific (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In inductive coding, researchers avoid using ready codes, and let categories "flow from data" (Moretti et al., 2011). For abductive reasoning, Krippendorff (2004) benefited from Eco (1994), and Josephson and Josephson (1994)'s studies. Eco (1994) stated that explaining an assumption means trying to understand a "law" that can explain a result. He, then proceeded to say that in interpreting the texts, the result is accepted if only a good law is discovered (as cited in Krippendorff, 2004). Eco probably tried to explain that since the text is a subjective material, only valid and, maybe, solid explanations could make it acceptable, in other words, meaningful. As for Josephson and Josephson (1994), they indicated that for abduction, first, the data is needed. They claimed that the hypothesis of the study can explain the data, and can be used to deduce other entitlements like the answers to the research questions (as cited in Krippendorff,

2004). To make this approach clear, Bonfantini and Proni (1988), and Truzzi (1988) gave the example of Sherlock Holmes. According to them, his inference is indeed abductive. This means that Sherlock detects empirical connections between incidents and combine them with common knowledge in the context of existing facts. Through inference, he then reaches to a conclusion and finds the perpetrator of the crime (as cited in Krippendorff, 2004). Krippendorff (2004) then states that content analysts are in a similar position, which makes them draw inferences about phenomena that are unobservable direct to the eye and use a combination of statistical knowledge, theory, experience, and intuition to reach an answer from existent texts.

To return to the process of content analysis in the light of the inference approach, it is seen that actually there are not many versions of it. As a matter of fact, this lack of process explanation has caught the attention of some researchers (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; as cited in Cho & Lee, 2014). Nonetheless, most researchers used the same procedure but some added certain concepts to it. Now, these will be described in detail. Mayring (2003) explains that inductive category development consists of “a) the research question, b) the determination of category and levels of abstraction, c) the development of inductive categories from material, d) the revision of categories, e) the final working through text, and f) the interpretation of results”. In deductive category development, only the second and third steps are different: “b) theoretical-based definitions of categories, and c) theoretical-based formulation of coding rules” (as cited in Cho & Lee, 2014). Mayring’s whole look to qualitative content analysis will be mentioned in further detail onwards.

Stemler (2001) criticized the perception of the qualitative content analyses that only employs frequency analysis. He argued that the logic behind this is the assumption that most used words mean the most to the communicator, and while this may be true with some cases there are some contradictions to using frequency when making inferences about important things. He then described coding types used in content analysis, which seems to represent inductive and deductive categorization with only the names changed. In emergent coding the data is examined beforehand and then coded. Thus far, it is similar to inductive category development. However,

he gives a process for doing this which starts with two people independently reading the material and creating a checklist. Then, the checklists are compared to each other and the differences are pointed out. After that, a combined checklist is used and the material is coded independently, for their reliability to be checked later. This process is repeated until the reliability is at a desirable level. Finally, after the reliability is assured, the coding process is carried out on a large-scale basis, and is periodically checked for quality (as cited in Stemler, 2001). The other coding type is the a priori coding which has established categories based upon a theory. This definition is very similar to deductive category assignment. In this process, researchers agree on the categories to be used and this is employed on the data. As the coding continues, necessary revisions are made and the categories are arranged until mutual exclusivity and exhaustiveness are reached (as cited in Stemler, 2001).

Other than coding types, Stemler (2001) also mentioned the unit types. He defined three units of analysis: sampling units, context units, and recording units. Sampling unit is words, sentences, or paragraphs, whichever is the most suitable for the researcher. Context units may overlap and contain many recording units. They do not need to be independent or described separately. Although, they set physical limitations as to what kind of data is recorded. Recording unit, on the other hand, is almost never defined by physical boundaries.

Ballstaedt, Mandl, Schnotz and Tergan (1981) explained that in inductive category development, it is done as a strategy to reduce the text (as cited in Spannagel et al., 2005). Calling it summarization (Spannagel et al., 2005), they stated that it is most used in qualitative content analysis. By reducing, paraphrasing and generalizing, it allows for creating inductive categories (as cited in Spannagel et al., 2005). However, contradictive to qualitative content analysis, they stated that inductive category development allows for quantification. In reality, qualitative analysis is not interested in making quantifications, but this confusion is not something new, and it seems it will be discussed further in the future. Nevertheless, they also talked about deductive category assignment, which the technique often used is structurization. This type of analysis allows the researcher to give specific definitions, examples and



coding rules for each category. This helps determining the criteria for a code to be put into a certain category (Spannagel et al., 2005).

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) differentiated three types of qualitative content analysis: “*conventional, directed, and summative*”. Conventional content analysis is similar to inductive content analysis as it is defined that it is often used when there is limited knowledge or theory about the phenomenon under study. In this type, researchers try not to use already defined categories (as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), rather they let the categories “flow from” the data, much like inductive category development. The analysis process involves reading the data continuously and several times, coding, taking notes about the data, sorting codes into categories, and categories into clusters, and finally making definitions of codes and categories. The advantage of this approach is that it does not have a theoretical perspective, allowing the researcher to gain direct information about the study participants. However, there are some difficulties the researcher may face. It may be challenging to develop an understanding of the context, which can affect the findings in the sense of representativeness. One other difficulty is that this technique can be mistaken for other qualitative methods such as grounded theory or phenomenology. However, qualitative research allows flexibility in methods, so this may not be seen as a big problem. The final difficulty in conventional approach is that it is weak when it comes to generate a theory, because the sampling and analysis process make the relationship between concepts difficult to infer (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Directed content analysis seems similar to deductive content analysis. It starts from existing studies and theories, and its objective is to validate or broaden the knowledge in a theory. It has an advantage that since there are theories and studies about the topic in hand, the researcher might predict some relationships, which helps determining the coding scheme. Directed content analysis starts with researchers specifying key concepts as primary categories (as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Then, operational definitions of the categories are made. Moving on to the coding, there are two strategies when coding the data. This decision is made based on the research question. If the goal is to determine all occurrences of a particular

phenomenon, then the entire transcript is read and the parts that thought to represent it are highlighted, then the highlighted parts are coded using the coding scheme. The parts that are not coded are given a new code. The other strategy is to code the data without selecting specific parts of it. Data that cannot be coded are examined to decide if they will be a new category.

One of the advantages of directed content analysis is that it may contribute to an existent theory, and the codes and descriptive analysis might be shown as evidence. With contributing to an area, researchers to come are given an opportunity to build their researches onto these findings. Nevertheless, the beauty of qualitative research is that it can be employed to understand an undiscovered area.

One disadvantage of directed content analysis is that using theory might cause a bias. This may lead researchers to find specific content supporting or not supporting theory, and on the contrary it may cause them to overlook the context. Also, if interview technique is being used, participants may have a social desirability bias toward the probing questions.

Finally, summative content analysis has a quantitative aspect in which it quantifies some words or content regarding their use in contexts. This quantification is not used to make inferences about the data but to simply understand the usage of them. If the analysis stops at analyzing the manifest content, for sure, the analysis would be quantitative (as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Summative approach also analyzes the latent content. Analysis process starts with exploring the incidents which the researcher is interested in. Counting in this approach allows the researcher to make inferences about context with the use of the content (as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Summative content analysis has some advantages. One of them is that the method allows studying the phenomenon in an unobtrusive and nonreactive way (as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is also useful for acquiring insights about how words are used. Table 2.3 summarizes these three approaches to content analysis.

**Table 2.3. Differences among Three Approaches**

Type of content analysis	Study starts with	Timing of defining codes or keywords	Source of codes or keywords
Conventional content analysis	Observation	Codes are defined during data analysis	Codes are derived from data
Directed content analysis	Theory	Codes are defined before and during data analysis	Codes are derived from theory or relevant research findings
Summative content analysis	Keywords	Keywords are identified before and during data analysis	Keywords are derived from interest of researchers or review of literature

Source: Hsieh & Shannon, 2005.<sup>1</sup>

Cho and Lee (2014) acknowledge that qualitative content analysis has a systematic coding process. It requires coding, finding categories and themes. It also requires a reduction phase to focus on chosen features. These features are chosen relevant to the research question of the study (as cited in Cho & Lee, 2014). The qualitative content analysis process consists of selecting the unit of analysis, categorizing and finding themes from categories.

As mentioned above, they defined three core steps in content analysis. Choosing a unit of analysis is crucial for reduction. Creating categories is a way to lessen a large number of texts into fewer categories. Category is described as “items with similar meaning”. It is argued that categories must be mutually exclusive and exhaustive (as cited in Cho & Lee, 2014) as Stemler (2001) also conveyed, which means that there should not be any data in more than one category, and every data should be placed in an explicit category. The final step, establishing a theme, means connecting hidden meanings in categories in one place (as cited in Cho & Lee, 2014).

Forman and Damschroeder (2008) gave an explanation of how qualitative content analysis is conducted. For them, first, the researcher needs to create their research questions. After that, the method and data sources should be specified. Methods can be interviews, focus groups, observations or sampling of written texts. Data sources can be individuals or groups, and documents and records. After the

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<sup>1</sup> It is stated by SAGE Publications that “Permission is granted at no cost for use of content in a Master’s thesis”.

method and data sources are determined; the next step is to build a framework by viewing existing literature. When the framework is set, the unit of analysis should be chosen. They note, however, that there can be more than one unit of analysis. Then, the purposive sampling is employed. Purposive sampling's main objective is to understand a phenomenon rather than making generalizations. After, the coding is done; this can be either inductive or deductive, as mentioned above. Finally, the analysis is carried out. Actually, Forman and Damschroeder (2008) stated that in qualitative analysis, data collection and analysis should take place simultaneously. This is one of the advantages of qualitative research techniques.

Forman and Damschroeder (2008) explained one approach that they think is useful for content analysis. They suggest dividing the process into three phases: immersion, reduction and interpretation (as cited in Forman & Damschroeder, 2008). Immersion phase is engaging with the text and taking notes about it. Reduction is minimizing the amount of data to be relevant to research questions, break the data into more manageable themes and thematic segments, and to reorganize the data into categories by coding in a way that addresses the research questions. They add that while coding, code definitions must be mutually exclusive. And the final phase is interpretation which, obviously, means researcher making inferences about the data at hand.

Elo and Kyngäs (2008) talked about the process of content analysis from the view of coding approaches. They specified three main phases in both inductive and deductive analysis: preparation, organizing and reporting. In preparation, a representative sample should be chosen first. It is said that a probability or judgment sampling could be employed when data is too big to handle at one sitting (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). However, if the subject that is being talked about is qualitative analysis, quantitative procedures such as probability sampling are never used. Qualitative research uses purposive sampling. After the sample is chosen, the unit of analysis is selected. This can be letters, words, sentences, etc. (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Also at this phase, the researcher decides whether to look at manifest or latent content or both. Next, the researcher immerses with the data in hand by

reading it several times (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), and tries to understand what it means. When doing this, the researcher should ask these questions:

- Who is telling?
- Where is this happening?
- When did it happen?
- What is happening?
- Why? (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

After the researcher has ideas, thoughts, and insights about the data s/he should choose if the analysis will be inductive or deductive (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

If the inductive approach is selected, there are three mini-phases included: “open coding, creating categories, and abstraction”. When doing an open coding, the researcher takes notes and writes headings on the margins of the data. Later, these notes are read again and headings, which are necessary for the research, are written down. Then, the headings are transferred to a coding sheet and categories are freely generated (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

After the open coding, categories are grouped hierarchically, which decreases the number of categories. However, Dey (1993) speaks of a “belonging” to a group more than being related or similar. The final mini-phase, abstraction, is reaching a description of the research topic through category generating. At this phase, “belonging” subcategories are grouped into categories and categories are grouped as main categories. This process is resumed until the point it is not accurate and possible (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

If the deductive approach is selected, a categorization matrix is made. There are two types of matrices: structured, and unconstrained. The type of matrix is selected related with the goal of the study, and often it is based on previous works. After the matrix is made, all the data are coded according to it. The unconstrained matrix allows creating categories within the limits by using inductive content analysis. On the other hand, structured matrix only lets the researcher to choose content that fits the matrix (as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Although Elo and Kyngäs (2008) add that while

using a structured matrix, it is also possible to choose content that does not fit. These contents can be used to constitute, with inductive content analysis, their own concepts.

Schreier (2012) on the other hand, indicated that qualitative content analysis, regardless of the material and research question, always involves same steps in the same order: determining a research question; choosing the material; forming a coding frame that will usually consist of several main categories, with their own subcategories; breaking the material into units of coding; testing out the coding frame through double-coding, after that discussing the units that were coded differently (if there are more than one coder); assessing the coding frame in terms of the consistency of coding and in terms of validity and revising it accordingly; coding all material, using the revised version of the coding frame, and transforming the information to the case level; interpreting and presenting the findings. Schreier especially put emphasis on the coding frame and implementing a pilot phase by testing out the coding frame that the researcher had created, i.e. “double-coding”. For Schreier, double-coding can be done with more than one coder, checking the agreements or disagreements on the codes created or it can be done by the researcher himself/herself by coding the same material at different points in time. In the pilot phase, only a small part of the main material should be coded, and with this, the coding frame should be concretized. She also put a significant emphasis on the reliability and validity, which is debated among qualitative researchers, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, and gave the familiar formula for the coefficient of agreement (Schreier, 2012). Besides including multiple coders and validity and reliability, it can be said that Schreier’s description of the process is very clear and organized.

Zhang and Wildemuth (2016)’s steps are also very practical and easy to understand. They explain that first, the data is prepared. This step includes transforming all the data that are not written out into written text. The second step is to define the unit of analysis, which means to choose which part of the data is going to be coded. This part can differ from research to research and from researcher to researcher. It can be words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. After the unit of analysis is decided, a categories and coding scheme is developed. They explain that

this scheme can be derived from three sources: the data itself, previous related studies, and theories. This reminds the inductive and deductive category formation systems that are employed during the analysis. It will be thoroughly discussed later. An advantage of qualitative content analysis is also expressed against quantitative content analysis, that is, qualitative allowing the researcher to assign a unit to more than one category simultaneously (as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). When the scheme is ready, then, it is tested on a sample of text. They talk about multiple coders, thus, inter-coder agreement, and one's coding consistency. If the consistency is high, then the analysis process is resumed and all the text is coded. After all text is coded, it is suggested the researcher to recheck their coding consistency. Zhang and Wildemuth (2016) states that checking consistency is justified by saying human coders are subject to fatigue and likely to make more mistakes as the analysis continues. The seventh step for qualitative content analysis is to draw conclusions from the coded data. In this step, the researcher makes inferences from his/her coded data with his/her own understanding of the meanings. The final step is reporting methods and findings. They explain that in qualitative content analysis, it is important to report the decisions and practices regarding the coding process as well as the methods used to establish the trustworthiness of the study. This is why presenting findings from qualitative analysis is challenging. They also stated that the researcher needs to keep a balance between description and interpretation. It is needed to provide specification for the readers to understand the basis of the researcher's decisions (as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). Although, as mentioned before, Zhang and Wildemuth (2016)'s process is simple and easy, it is impossible to ignore the quantitative influence on it. First of all, for example, in the first step, they explained that all data should be transformed into written text. In qualitative approaches, and qualitative content analysis, there is not an obligation to transform, analysis can be conducted on the original form of the data. For instance, if a researcher wanted to employ content analysis on a movie, or a piece of music how could s/he do such thing? The analysis would have to be done on data as they are, for sure. Another quantitative influence that can be mentioned is the coding consistency and multiple coders and inter-coder agreement. In qualitative research, researcher doing his/her own analysis is preferred, there is certainly no need

for other coders and such a measurement as inter-coder agreement. In general, their narrative of the process is highly leaned toward quantitative research.

Kaid (1989) stated there are seven steps to conduct a qualitative content analysis. These are listed as, creating the research question, choosing the sample, defining the categories, planning the coding process and coder training, carrying out the coding process, determining trustworthiness, and analyzing the results (as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It can be said that Kaid's description, by mentioning the coder training, is influenced from quantitative research much like Zhang and Wildemuth (2016)'s.

Mayring (2014)'s definition of the process of qualitative content analysis is one of a kind. Mayring is the 21<sup>st</sup> century's one of the most important qualitative researchers. He has absolutely unique ideas about conducting qualitative content analysis. Before getting into further detail about his process, it must be said that he is a strong believer that qualitative and quantitative analysis should work together. He recurrently states that there are some quantitative aspects to be kept by qualitative analysis, and he mentions about them during the step-by-step model.

His procedure has seven basic steps. The first step is to form a concrete research question which is specific. The research question allows the researcher to base his/her application relevant. This step refers to creating hypotheses about the study in quantitative analysis, but since this is not possible in qualitative analysis, the researcher's standpoint about the topic can be regarded as the hypothesis. The researcher should clearly describe his/her point of view. The next step is successfully relating research question with theory. Mayring (2014) explains that every research is, hidden or formulated, affected by assumptions or prejudices; and that this is especially valid if there is interpretation. That is why it is crucial to associate theory with research question.

The third step is to define the design of the research. Mayring (2007) had differentiated four designs: explorative, descriptive, correlational, and causal designs (as cited in Mayring, 2014). He expresses that, in contrast to some quantitative researchers, he believes that descriptive and explorative designs may as well be



scientifically significant if designed according to a plan. In content analysis, he adds one more design: mixed. After deciding on the design, the next step is to define the sample and the sampling strategy. It is known that qualitative analyses do not use probabilistic samples, but Mayring (2014) argues that qualitative studies should also give a description and explanation of why the given sample and the sampling strategy is used. It can be said that the key thing in the methodology of qualitative analyses is the description and argumentation of how, why, and what (has been done). Nevertheless, he warns that convenient samples should be avoided. The fifth step is to do a pilot study. Mayring believes that even in qualitative content analysis, in order for researchers to argue why they used such procedures, they should first test their initial coding systems which are derived from inductive analysis, or their choice of technique. He contends that by doing this, it provides methodological strength. Actually, this is a very strong quantitatively leaning step. This issue should be discussed in the future studies.

The next step after the pilot study is to process the study and report the results. Both quantitative and qualitative studies should present their results in an extensive description with the aim of answering the research's question. The final step of the process is to discuss the quality criteria. He argues that objectivity, reliability, and validity cannot be implemented on qualitative studies and that the idea of triangulation is not possible either for his unique understanding of the method. That is why he suggests using validity in a wider range, and working for an increased reliability. Qualitative analysis being rule-guided can solve this problem (of reliability). And as for the objectivity he argues that since qualitative studies explain the interaction-researcher-subject, this can strengthen this criterion.

It was mentioned that Mayring (2014) listed some strengths of quantitative content analysis that qualitative analysis should hold. These are 1) embedding of the material within the communicative context: The text must always be interpreted in its context, the researcher must determine to which part of the communication process s/he wants to associate his/her results; 2) systematic, rule-bound procedure: Content analysis must be adapted and constructed according to the question in hand. The

definition of units of analysis should be held, considering this leads the researcher to decide his/her approach to the data, which parts s/he is going to analyze and in what order, and the conditions to be accessed for coding. Additionally, the researcher should base his/her selections on theories that other researchers are able to replicate the study in the future; 3) categories in the focus of analysis: In qualitative content analysis, a category-based analysis should be acquired. By having a category system, the study will be able to be compared and reproduced by other researchers and be reliable; 4) object reference in place of formal techniques: Although qualitative analyses may not be following quantitative techniques, that does not mean they can be employed anywhere and everywhere. An affiliation with the object of analysis should be made; 5) testing specific instruments via pilot studies: Because qualitative content analysis gives the utmost importance to the association with the object, it must be first tested with a pilot study; 6) theory-guided character of the analysis: Qualitative content analysis is a flexible method, therefore there should be some decisions made about the procedure and the stages of analysis. For this, theoretical arguments should be used, and while doing this, the importance should be given to content-related arguments more than procedural arguments; 7) integrating quantitative steps of analysis: This is especially for when there is a need for generalization. Complex statistical techniques can be used to support the qualitative analysis, as long as it is appropriate and well-suited; 8) Quality criteria: Since qualitative content analysis is a flexible method, the issues of reliability, validity, and objectivity comes forward. But a way should be found to evaluate qualitative content analysis in this sense. Another aspect can be added to these: context-analytical units. Mayring (2014) also offers to use the units of analysis of quantitative content analysis. These are differentiated as the coding unit, the context unit, and the recording unit by Krippendorff (as cited in Mayring, 2014). The coding unit specifies the smallest part of the data to be evaluated and put in a category; the context unit specifies the biggest part of the data to be put in a category; and the recording unit specifies which parts of the text are met with the category system.



### **CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY**

In this study, the importance of conducting a completely qualitative content analysis is emphasized. The importance comes from the aim of this study to contribute to literature by analyzing the methodologies of theses which used qualitative content analysis in Turkey. Defining the technique methodologically will provide the researchers with clarity. Therefore, the motivation for this study is to identify the process and characteristics of qualitative content analysis. With this motivation, the analysis of this study will allow to share the gained knowledge with other researchers. The motivation is also crucial to make an explaining possible on how to conduct qualitative content analysis and how to lessen the misunderstandings about it.

Content analysis, specifically qualitative content analysis, is being used commonly from the start of this century. With the motivation in mind, the initial target fields to cover were sociology, anthropology and psychology. When Thesis Center, the online database of CoHE is checked for theses which conducted content analysis as their method in these three fields, there are 243 theses found in total (CoHE Thesis Center, 2018). However, when the same fields are searched for qualitative content analysis, a limited number of graduate theses are found. Then, it is decided to expand the fields and include every social science thesis which conducted qualitative content analysis in Turkey.

One of the most important part while planning a study is to decide whether to use quantitative or qualitative research. This is mostly based on research questions the researcher has in mind. These research questions can be answered in different ways, approaches to social science. Each approach has a philosophical background about the understanding of the world, the logic and assumptions behind it and how to get to this knowledge. These “guidelines” help the researcher to conduct his/her research in a comprehensive way. Every researcher might be aware of these guidelines while doing a research; most of them come unknowingly (Neuman, 2014). These so-called “guidelines” are the ontology and the epistemology.

Ontology is the nature of reality, or phenomena, or entities (Neuman, 2014; Mason, 2002). There are two basic positions to this question; first one is realism. Realists define the world as being “out there.” Therefore, the reality of a social phenomenon, whatever it might be, is out there to be explored. Realists do not put a significant meaning to different interpretations. The reality exists independently from humans’ interpretations of it. The second position is nominalism. Nominalists, in contrast to realists, do not assume the reality is out there waiting for the researcher to discover it. The reality is highly subjective, thus dependent on the interpretations of humans. This subjectivity comes from humans being social creatures, and having cultures that affect their way of seeing the world (Neuman, 2014). It can be easily deduced that most quantitative approaches hold the assumption of realists, and most qualitative approaches hold the assumption of nominalists. For this study, the nominalist position is adopted because the researcher believes that the reality is subjective and reaching to one true reality is not possible.

Epistemology is related with ontology. It is simply about how to learn about the reality that is accepted, the theory of knowledge (Neuman, 2014; Mason, 2002). To put it even more simply, epistemology helps the researcher to choose a method to conduct on his/her study. Realists, with the assumption of the reality being out there, naturally use careful, empirical and objective observations of reality. They try to verify or falsify their ideas about a reality by gathering empirical evidence. By this way, they reach to truth. Nominalists, on the other hand, with their assumption of the reality being subjective, do not use objective observations as a method to reach the reality, since every individual’s interpretation is different from the other. In fact, nominalist position does not try to “reach” to a reality; rather they “generate” it with those being studied. To generate knowledge, nominalists “inductively observe, interpret, and reflect” what their participants are saying and doing in social contexts. While doing this, they also reflect on their own experiences and interpretations (reflexivity) (Neuman, 2014). Mason (2002) explains the use of the term “generation” as it being more accurate for qualitative researchers as they do not assume the researchers can “collect” all the information about the social reality neutrally. Instead, the researcher is active in constructing knowledge according to his/her

epistemological position. This study’s epistemological approach is interpretivist, mainly because it is the approach suitable for the nominalist ontology. It is also because, for the most part, the inductive approach is adopted for the analysis.

Qualitative analysis process usually follows like this: reading the material, coding, creating categories, and developing themes (Table 3.1). When reading the material entirely for the first time, the researcher should focus only on what the material is telling to them and try to understand it (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). By focusing on understanding the material, the researcher is able to identify the most crucial aspects of the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

**Table 3.1. Phases and Stages of Theme Development in Qualitative Content Analysis**

<b>Phases</b>	<b>Stages</b>
<b>Initialization</b>	Reading transcriptions and highlighting meaning units; Coding and searching for abstractions in participants’ accounts; Writing reflective notes.
<b>Construction</b>	Categorizing; Comparing; Labeling; Translating and transliterating; Defining and describing.
<b>Rectification</b>	Immersion and distancing; Relating themes to established knowledge; Stabilizing.
<b>Finalization</b>	Developing the story line.

Source: Vaismoradi et al., 2016.<sup>1</sup>

After reading the entire data, the coding process starts. Miles and Huberman (1994) define codes as labels that give meaning to descriptive and interpretive information cumulated during a study. Codes can be assigned to different sizes of pieces which consist of words that gain meaning by context, and are used to retrieve and manage these pieces. Codes can also be in different levels of abstraction. Descriptive codes require little interpretation whereas detailed interpretive codes emerge as the researcher gains more information about the topic in hand. The last type of codes is pattern codes, which are much more interpretive and explanatory than the

<sup>1</sup> Written permission of the authors was obtained.

other two. These codes are used in data generation when patterns start to emerge out of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Coding is also defined as “taking raw data and raising it to a conceptual level” or “reducing the amount of raw data” and reconstructing them into higher levels of abstract concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2016). This means coding makes the material in hand more abstract, and this is because researchers “use intuition” to derive meanings (as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Corbin and Strauss (2008) emphasize that coding process includes interacting with data by directing questions to them, comparing them between each other, thinking about them and such. This is because the more the researcher engages in data, the more they are inclined to recognize other meanings of it. Different structures can be used for coding, for example, a word, a sentence, a paragraph and such. These are called unit of analysis. In Corbin and Strauss (2008), Corbin states that she uses “natural breaks ... as cutting off points.” This could be understood as any one of the structures that was mentioned. After selecting a unit of analysis, the researcher examines the units thoroughly (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and tries to derive concepts to label these units.

After the entire data is coded, the categorization process begins. Category is a “descriptive level of text” (as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2016), and categories are also “descriptors of themes”. Categories are created with comprehensiveness and mutually exclusiveness rules. The codes are organized and placed in categories where they have similarity or difference with other codes. As well as codes, categories are also named according to groups of codes they are comprised of. If there is a doubt about a code to place it in a category or another, it should be placed in the category where it “best fits” (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

After organizing codes into categories they are compared between each other. This way, some themes can be detected (as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Themes contain codes which share similarity about a certain topic and bring together ideas with a “high degree of generality” (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Following this step, right before themes start to fully emerge from the data, Vaismoradi et al. (2016) suggest

researchers to “distance themselves from the data” for some time. This, in their opinion, will cause increased sensitivity towards data. The last step is the finalization of themes, in which researchers report the relationships between them in written form, like a “story line” and answer the research question(s).

In the time of technology, social sciences are not behind on using computers. It is known that, for quantitative research, software programs are used almost all the time. Qualitative research has been using it also in conjunction with its development in social sciences. These programs have been developing since the 1980s, especially for qualitative content analysis, and are called Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) (as cited in Mayring, 2014). Mayring (2014) states two reasons to use software for qualitative content analysis: 1) materials to analyze are mostly in the form of files that are easily transferred into these programs; and 2) software programs can be helpful for the systematic nature of qualitative content analysis. Riffe et al. (2014) also supports Mayring’s first reason to use a software stating that if the materials to analyze are in or can be easily converted into digital form, then a software can be used.

At the first stages of the development of these programs, each had a different task which Weitzman and Miles (1995) distinguished between five types (as cited in Schreier, 2012): text retrievers, text base managers, code and retrieve packages, code-based theory builders, and conceptual network builders. The current programs for qualitative analysis generally can do all of these tasks (Schreier, 2012).

It should be noted that software programs are only for helping the researchers on their data analysis. These programs let the researcher to organize and manage their material, choose and mark specific segments of it and attach multiple keywords and categories to them, to write memos about a code, and retrieve what you had assigned in different ways such as listing all of the codes, searching for passages that were assigned same (multiple) codes (Schreier, 2012; Mayring, 2014). As practical and magically beautiful as these features are, the researcher still has the important responsibility to interpret the material at hand. The program only serves as an assistant (Mayring, 2014).



### **3.1. Method of the study**

In this study, qualitative content analysis is used as the method. Qualitative content analysis is highly underrepresented methodologically in the literature, especially in Turkey. In the literature review, books and articles about content analysis is read. This helped to create the theoretical framework of this study. With qualitative content analysis, the method's application is analyzed through completed Master's and PhD theses in Turkey.

This study is an example of naturalistic approach in the sense of its data source; therefore, it is aimed at studying already existing sources, i.e. Master's and PhD theses. CoHE's online Thesis Center is chosen as the main data source. From this database, Master's and PhD theses which were eligible for this study are selected. Eligibility of theses is described as "having used qualitative content analysis, either as a research or as an analysis technique." For sampling, consecutive-unit type of purposive sampling is used. This is because, for the sample, Master's and PhD theses which used qualitative content analysis as their method or analysis technique are selected from the year 2010 as a starting point, in which the method had started to used more commonly.

There are certain criteria for choosing the theses. The first criterion is that these are social sciences theses. Second one is to be written starting from 2010, the third is to be confirmed by the Council and given full access by their authors. Another criterion is to have either "nitel içerik analizi" or "qualitative content analysis" keywords in the thesis' entirety. For the search, following filters are used: thesis type (Master's and PhD), access type ("Authorized"), status ("Confirmed"), language (Turkish and English), group (Social Sciences) and year (from 2010 to 2018) as well as the keywords mentioned. As a result, 42 eligible theses are found for the sample which consists of 27 Master's theses and 15 PhD dissertations. These theses are from various research areas including psychology, sociology, communication studies, education, and anthropology. These theses can be divided by as follows: 1 in Anthropology discipline, 1 in Sociology discipline, 1 in Linguistics discipline, 2 in Psychology discipline, 2 in Journalism discipline, 8 in Communications and related

disciplines, 8 in Economics and Administrative Studies and related disciplines, and 19 in Education and related disciplines.

It is seen that most of the theses which used qualitative content analysis is from the Educational Sciences and other related fields. This is a surprising finding because initially content analysis was used in communications, and qualitative content analysis was used first in sociology, anthropology, and social psychology. Therefore, it is unexpected to find out that there are more theses in Education than in fields which pioneered the technique. It is also surprising to see very few studies from linguistics, journalism, and sociology. This is because content analysis was first conducted in journalism and linguistics; and qualitative content analysis is first conducted in sociology. To learn more about the characteristics of the sample, Appendix A can be viewed.

There are also theses which used qualitative content analysis, but are not authorized by their authors for full access or still pending for confirmation. The number of theses that cannot be accessed for Master's is 26, and for PhD it is 12. However, it should be indicated that since the search is done both in Turkish and English there is a chance that same theses are found in different queries. Furthermore, it is seen that the database might be yielding different results with each search which something the user does not have control on.

After reaching the sample, the analysis process began. For the analysis, the reading of the data focused on introduction, methodology, and analysis and findings sections of the theses are reviewed. In introduction sections, research questions are of main focus. Mainly the ontology-epistemology-methodology consistency is evaluated in the reading process. Subsequently, the coding process started.

While categorizing codes, both inductive and deductive category formation have been implemented. A code list was naturally formed prior to coding phase due to the first reading. This part constituted the deductive category formation. In qualitative content analysis, the real scope of the analysis is understood by inductive category development. In the coding process, some codes were put into the categories which were in the code list, and some codes emerged and were developed from the

material as well, constituting the inductive category development part of the analysis. There are two coding processes took place. As a result of the first coding process, 11 categories and 2 subcategories are generated, and 6 themes emerged. The first coding is done using MAXQDA Version 11 (VERBI Software, 2012). MAXQDA allows the users to “collect, organize, analyze, visualize and publish” data. It also supports various types of data such as PDF files, tables, images, media files, Word documents, etc. (VERBI Software, 2018).

However, MAXQDA’s features did not fully serve for the study’s needs; therefore, for the second coding process NVivo 12 Pro for Windows is used (QSR International, 2018). NVivo has features very similar to MAXQDA, but the researcher found it to be more user friendly. For that reason, NVivo is chosen in the final stage. This coding process is also both deductive and inductive. After the second coding process is finished there had been some changes. For example, some codes are changed, and some new codes are added which specifies the phenomena in more detail. This coding process generated 14 categories and 11 themes. Subcategories in the first coding process are merged and added into a category.

### **3.2. Ethical procedures**

Ethics in science began to be considered an important aspect mainly after Nuremberg trials, and scientific studies about atomic bomb, which were two milestones in science for it to be neutral, value-free and beneficial (as cited in Bresler, 1995). With these surfacing, ethics have become a central issue in the 1960s and 1970s. As for qualitative research, with gaining power especially in social sciences, there appeared a need for ethical rules to apply. This issue is mentioned in several conferences, textbooks and books on research methodology. Ethics in qualitative research is particularly important as the researcher usually establishes a bond with the researched and there can be a power relationship between them (Bresler, 1995).

This study does not have participants, however, since the sample consists of graduate theses, an ethical approval is essential. This approval is usually given from a commission that works under the presidency of institutions, e.g. universities. For this study, an ethical approval application was sent to Hacettepe University Ethics

Commission, briefly explaining the study. In the application, it was also stated that the names of the writers, as well as identifying features, of the theses will not be used to provide confidentiality. The application was approved by the Commission on 17 July 2018 (Appendix B). After the approval, coding was started.

Bresler (1995) mentions two concepts in ethics which are representation of truth and confidentiality. Representation is actually connected with ontology and epistemology of the research. But since qualitative research assumes that there is not one reality out there, and that it is constructed and can change from perspective to perspective, it is important that the researcher is able to represent the truth with different points of view (Bresler, 1995). This study tries to achieve the representation of truth during analysis by supporting the arguments with direct quotes from the theses under study.

Confidentiality is related with sharing the information generated with the public. This is usually achieved by keeping the personal information anonymous (Bresler, 1995). During the research process of this study, a special importance is given to confidentiality, in which all of the theses mentioned in the analysis are given a letter code to keep them anonymous. Also, while quoting some of the content from these theses, some information that might indicate a specific person or study are also kept confidential, and instead a “...” or the [notion] were written. This information can be the university of the researcher or other places where their participants are. It can be said that this study care for ethical responsibilities diligently, toward both the researchers and their participants.

### **3.3. Limitations**

In every research, there can be some obstacles that hold back the research from reaching its full potential. These obstacles can be caused by different reasons. It can be related with the data source, sample, or the data itself. For example, if the researcher is working on hard copies of some documents, there may be erased, damaged parts of them. One of the limitations of this study is that the theses in the sample usually consist of very little detail about the methodology of the study. This issue results in a limited data for the study. In qualitative research it is possible to

make interpretations for non-existent things, because absence of a particular concept means something as well as its presence. Although there are some interpretations about a certain concept's absence in this study, a limited data about theses' methodology prevents the study from reaching its aim. One of the possible limitations is that it was expected to be more theses in fields such as sociology, psychology and anthropology. Unfortunately, however, this is not the case. There are limited number of theses written in these fields. One shortcoming of the sample is that there is not a thesis written in health sciences in Turkey which conducts qualitative content analysis. Usually, health sciences, especially nursing studies, use the technique very commonly in foreign literature. However, when it is searched for Turkish database, not one thesis is found. One of the limitations of this study is the fact that only the theses which were given full access by their owners are able to be analyzed. There is information about these theses only. Also, there is the fact that this study's sample consists of the theses which were written, confirmed and put on the database until 30 July 2018, which the data generation started. Another limitation is that in the literature in Turkey, there are not many studies which explain the method completely, making the process somewhat difficult because the researcher has to train themselves. The analysis process is entirely up to the researcher, which can be a limitation itself, because being a novice researcher might cause the study to be a little cluttered.

## CHAPTER 4. EVALUATION OF THE METHODOLOGIES OF THESES

In this chapter, the findings of the analysis are discussed. First, the categories are defined; then, relationships between the codes and categories are discussed with the support of the quotations from analyzed theses.

In this study, the analysis process started with data generation. For the analysis process, first, 42 theses in the sample are read to comprehend what is in hand. While starting to read the theses, some notes are taken according to a checklist prepared by the researcher and the supervisor of this study to determine the approach, research questions and analysis process of theses. After reading primarily the method/methodology chapters of all theses for the first time, coding is started. As mentioned before, both inductive and deductive coding are employed in this study, and the texts are coded with paragraphs being the unit of analysis. After coding, and before creating categories, some of the codes are merged as they are reflecting same or similar concepts. In the end of the coding process, categories are formed. The analysis revealed 14 categories in total. These are *Ethics*, *Qualitative research process*, *Reference/Citation*, *Controversial issues*, *Universe-Sampling-Sample*, *Content analysis*, *Analysis process*, *Features of the study*, *Method*, *Use of technology*, *Quantitative research*, *Language*, *Validity-Reliability*, and *Data source-Data generation*. Each of the categories is explained in detail hereafter.

### 4.1. Categories

*Ethics (Etik)* category includes ethical behavior, anonymity, confidentiality and ethical approval codes. Ethical approval stands for the accepted application to the Ethics Committee to the related institute the study is done. This category refers to the study being ethical. This study lays a great emphasis on ethics; therefore, this category is crucial. Being ethical during a research is the conscience of a research. It is assumed that, all of the theses analyzed in this study took the necessary steps and conducted their research ethically. However, the important thing in this study is that these ethical procedures should be made public in order to make their research more valuable in

terms of trustworthiness. Stating these procedures also holds the responsibility of being good examples for future studies.

*Qualitative research process (Nitel araştırma süreci)* category includes codes about qualitative research such as using quotations, transcription, field study, data analysis etc. This category is important because studies which have a qualitative approach or use qualitative techniques should describe the research process and its characteristics so they can have a solid foundation for their study.

*Reference/Citation (Referans)* category has been a category since the beginning of the coding. This category includes all researchers that are cited throughout the methods section. Especially the researches in methodology field are taken into account, since this study aims to determine which publications are primarily used to define and form the basis of the study's method. This category is highly related with the *Ethics* category.

*Controversial issues (Tartışmalı konular)* category stands for topics the researcher finds controversial. This category includes codes such as inter-coder reliability, online interviews, quantifying qualitative data etc. This category bears a great importance because it provides the information for the researcher to address the themes such as vagueness and confusion.

*Universe-Sampling-Sample (Evren-Örnekleme-Örnekleme)* category includes the mention of the sampling type, definitions of universe and sample, characteristics of the sample of a study, how the sample is chosen, what are left out of the sample and codes alike. This category is important as stating the characteristics of the study's sampling technique and sample is deemed valuable in this study. For example, the criteria used to create the sample, why that sample is chosen, or why a particular item/person is not selected for the sample should be written about. Another reason why this category is valuable for this study is that the consistency between the approach and sampling technique is checked. Qualitative research has its own sampling techniques; therefore, these techniques should be used if the researcher claims to be doing qualitative research. Explaining the reasons behind these criteria makes the research more interesting and more comprehensible for readers.

*Content analysis (İçerik analizi)* category includes codes related to content analysis in general such as the definition of content analysis, features of qualitative content analysis, inductive and deductive category formations. This category is created according to this study's subject. With this category, it is checked if the study used quantitative or qualitative content analysis, and if it is defined and described enough. It is crucial for a method or a technique to be explained in order to have a comprehensive methodology. The explanation is also important to inform the readers about the study as there might be readers who are new to the field and do not know every research technique.

*Analysis process (Analiz süreci)* category includes mainly the codes related to the analysis process, such as unit of analysis, coding process, analysis process, categories etc. This category refers to the overall mentions and processes that have connection with analysis. Some codes, such as different types of analysis techniques (content analysis, descriptive analysis), are merged for this category. The important thing about this category is that in the analysis, it is checked if the study mentioned the analysis process, the analysis technique used and if this technique is defined, or if the unit of analysis is described. These are important in qualitative research as there are not dependent/independent variables like in quantitative research. The researcher should be open about their analysis process and technique, and its aspects.

*Features of the study (Çalışmanın özellikleri)* category includes research questions, aim, subject, hypotheses, assumptions codes and other codes related to a study's general structure. This category refers to structural features of a study, only if they are mentioned in the method section. As a matter of fact, this category involves somewhat everything about a research. One dimension of this category analyzes the formal structure of a study. Another dimension analyzes the structural features given about the research, such as stating hypotheses (if any), research questions, concepts about the topic of the study and the like.

*Method (Yöntem)* category refers to, as it stands out from its name, the mentions and processes related to the method and the methodology of the study. This category includes codes such as method process, method of the research and its



components, features of qualitative (or quantitative) research, etc. The most merging is done in this category because of different types of research methods mentioned. This category is related with many other categories. It is important for this category if the research method used and its properties are clearly defined in the thesis. This process is, again, about transparency. The researcher should make their research process explanatory for the readers to understand what is done in that research. Another important thing about this category is that the consistency between ontology and methodology is checked. A qualitative research should not use, for example, pre-test post-test design.

*Use of technology (Teknoloji kullanımı)* category refers to new applications that technology allows the researchers. This category mainly includes tools such as software programs to help the analysis process, video and voice recordings. The technology in use is changing at a rapid rate, therefore, it is important to catch the era with use of modern technological devices such as recorders and software programs.

*Quantitative research (Nicel araştırma)* category includes codes related to quantitative research, such as dependent and independent variables, objectivity, etc. This category is created to separate quantitative concepts from others. Another reason to create this category is that a considerable number of theses in the sample used mixed methods approach and/or quantitative techniques to generate their data. Therefore, there is also a considerable amount of codes referring to these aspects.

*Language (Dil)* category includes language in use and language appropriate for qualitative approach. This category mainly refers to the language used in the study. It stands for qualitative understanding. Qualitative researches should use a certain language, which has different terms than quantitative research. This category analyzes the qualitative understanding of a study.

*Validity-Reliability (Geçerlik-Güvenirlilik)* category is created because, although validity and reliability issues are much debated in qualitative content analysis, these terms are used due to their recognition in research methodology. This category refers to the usage of concepts such as inter-coder reliability, which is contradictory to qualitative analysis' nature. The reason this category is named after

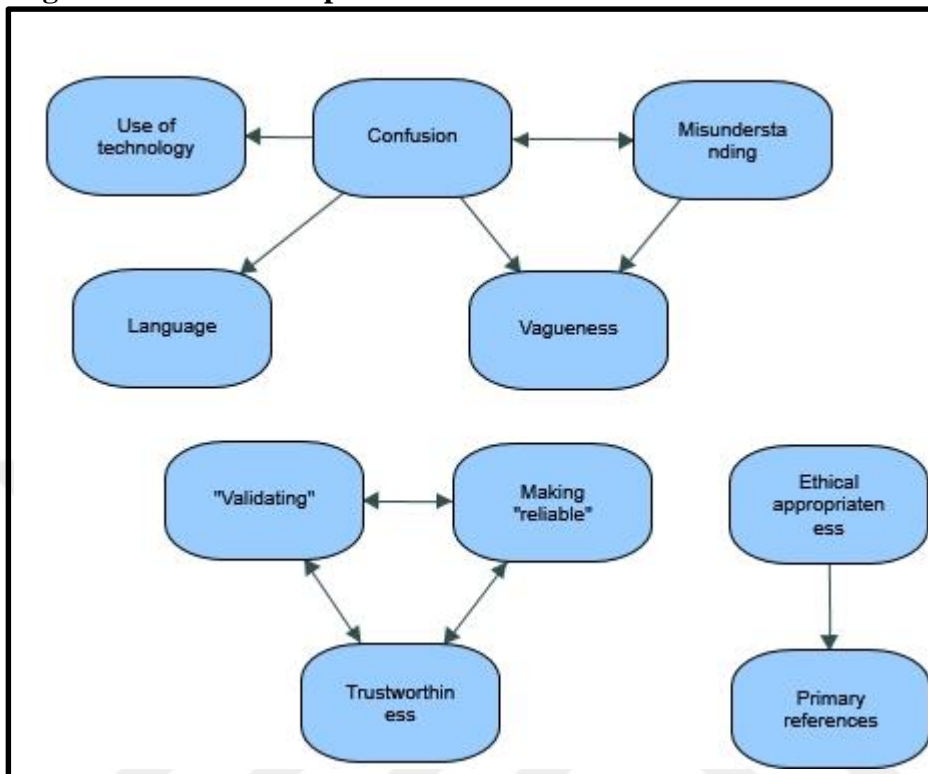
what is opposed in this study is that each study which used these kinds of measurements referred to these as reliability and/or validity. This category is named as it is, to emphasize the ingrained effect of quantitative research, especially in qualitative content analysis.

*Data Source-Data Generation (Veri kaynağı-Veri oluşturma)* category includes data generation technique, tool, process codes and the like. In qualitative studies the word “generation” is preferred due to its ontology; therefore, it is also used in this study. However, as it will be discussed more in the oncoming pages, most of the studies do not use this term. This category mainly refers to the process of data generation of a study.

#### **4.2. Themes**

From the analysis, various themes emerged which will be explained and discussed along with quotations from theses. There are 11 themes emerged, in total, however, because reliability and trustworthiness concepts are highly related with each other, themes related with these are discussed under the same heading. The relationships of themes can be seen in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1. Relationships between Themes**



It is seen that Prioritizing structure theme is not included in the relationships, because it is found that it has no relationship with any other themes. This is because this theme mostly focuses on the structure of the theses, and other themes are mostly related with the content of theses. There is a one-way relationship between Ethical appropriateness and Primary references, and it is because references only include the researchers which are cited. However, being ethically appropriate implies citing the researches when needed. Reliability, its qualitative term trustworthiness and validity concepts are interrelated, that is why the themes which cover these concepts (making “reliable”, reaching trustworthiness, and “validating” qualitative analysis) have two-way relationships with each other. Confusion about fundamentals of paradigms (confusion) and Misunderstanding of the techniques (misunderstanding) themes also have a two-way relationship in which certain misconceptions about techniques lead to a confusion about the method and being confused about the foundations of an approach leads to misunderstandings and different applications of research techniques. These two themes both have one-way relationships with Vagueness in definitions (vagueness) theme, which is logical since confusions and

misunderstandings can lead to being vague about certain concepts. Confusion theme also has one-way relationships with Use of language (language) and Use of technology themes. These relationships are explained in detail in the analysis.

#### **4.2.1. Confusion about fundamentals of paradigms**

The analysis showed that there seems to be some confusion about certain issues. This confusion stems from the fact that there is not a solid foundation for research methodology. Not being clear about the knowledge of ontology and epistemology of research paradigms cause the researchers to get disorganized and use, for example, quantitative techniques for qualitative methods. This seems to be the case especially for sampling techniques and also for analysis process. Sometimes this confusion can be about the software to use. Latter is a matter for only one thesis, however, it is thought important to be mentioned.

There is a natural relationship between universe, sample and sampling concepts. Universe, or population, involves sample, the sample is created from the universe, according to a technique each methodological approach has, by sampling. Qualitative and quantitative researches have different sampling techniques; therefore, it is expected that, since most theses in this study's sample are declared to be qualitative, the sampling procedure should also be according to qualitative sampling techniques. Although techniques used for sampling are exceedingly qualitative, there are some cases where quantitative sampling techniques are used for qualitative methods. For example, "K" and "G" are PhD dissertations in Education, "C" is a Master's thesis written in Public Relations.

"Lastly in the qualitative part of the study, 20 participants in total (random selection) ... from the personnel who work in the schools which was interviewed were examined ... through the short form the researcher prepared (see Appendix 5)."-K, Education

"The episodes that will be watched for this study is determined with simple random sampling."-C, Public Relations

“As the study is an experimental one, purposeful sampling was preferred by the researcher because the participants should have some specific features such as to be [variable], and to have [another variable].”-G, Education

The problem here is that the researchers claim they are conducting a qualitative research; however, they use random sampling to reach to their sample. Another issue is that when the tool mentioned in the quotation mentioned by “K” is checked, it is discovered that it is a simple questionnaire which includes close ended questions which participants fill in themselves. Qualitative research prefers using open ended questions where these are directed to the participants by the interviewer in private places where their confidentiality is cared for and uses different sampling techniques to reach to them. Another confusion happened in thesis “G”, where it is stated that the study is experimental, meaning quantitative, however, the sample is chosen with purposeful sampling. This issue can be discussed, however, purposeful sampling is mostly used in qualitative research and is a non-probabilistic sampling type. Experimental studies are quantitative studies, and probabilistic sampling types should be used. However, like it is said before, this is arguable as the researcher reasons their use of sampling by saying that they are looking for participants with certain types of characteristics.

The thesis mentioned in the first paragraph is a good example for confusion. This Master’s thesis (“Q”) is written in Education field and used SPSS for its qualitative data. The need for quantifying qualitative data is a controversial topic, however, it is a known fact that qualitative research has its own analysis techniques and software programs. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand how these qualitative data entered into a quantitative software as there are no explanations about that.

“After determining a total of 420 metaphors and developing 22 conceptual themes, all data were entered into SPSS statistical program. After this procedure, firstly, the number of participants (*f*) and participant percentile that represent 420 metaphors and 22 themes are calculated.”-Q, Education

The issue with quantifying qualitative data is most probably caused by the confusion which roots from the dominance of quantitative methodology in social

sciences. It is seen that in 7 theses, it is openly expressed that either quantifying data increases the reliability of the study or that qualitative paradigm allows to quantify. “B” is a PhD dissertation written in Education, “AK” is a Master’s thesis in Communication Sciences, and “M” is also a PhD thesis in Political Science.

“The reliability is increased by quantifying the qualitative data and measuring the percentage of agreement.”-K, Education

“Another important function of qualitative paradigm is that it allows to quantify the data. To put it differently, in studies carried out with this pattern, data, which are gathered from texts, can be turned into frequencies by categorizing.”-B, Education

“Content analysis is used to reveal and interpret the underlying meanings. It is a method for transforming qualitative concepts into quantitative results. ... Quantitative content analysis provides the study with more scientific results.”-AK, Communication

“Quantifying the results of the qualitative analysis further enabled generalization of the outcomes of the qualitative stage, and also clarified different trends within and across the political systems analysed.”-M, Political Science

The trend in quantifying qualitative data, or even claiming that qualitative approach allows the researcher to quantify, is simply mislead. This is probably caused by the confusion and the need to enhance the knowledge about the literature. However, it is known that qualitative approach is used for a very long time, making the publications to follow not quite new. This means that research methodology should be learned thoroughly before starting a study.

There is a natural relationship between the method, data generation technique and tool, and analysis. From the analysis, it is seen that, in general, data generation techniques the studies used are in line with their methods. Sixteen out of 42 theses in this study is found to use qualitative research techniques, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups. As mentioned in the beginning, it is seen that there is also some

confusion about the analysis process. This comes in the form of using statistical calculations such as frequencies in qualitative data analysis. Relationships in some of the theses are mostly based on these statistical analyses and not on the coding process and what it shows. “S” is a Master’s thesis in Media and Cultural Studies. “T” and “U” are also Master’s theses both written in Education field.

“This research avoided the risk of content analysis to reach shallow results, focusing on qualitative evaluation also by reading critically news stories. Numerical data collected by qualitative concerns provide relatively reliable inferences bringing answers to the main questions of this study.”-S, Media and Cultural Studies

“... was analyzed in line with the sub-themes and codes and frequency and percentiles were calculated through the program.”-T, Education

“Frequencies and categorical analysis technique are used in accordance with the qualitative data analysis as part of the research.”-U, Education

These examples show that there is still a need to enhance the qualitative understanding. When the years were checked to see if there was a development about this issue, it is found that, unfortunately, even the most recent study claims qualitative research can have quantitative components.

As discussed before, ontology, epistemology and methodology are all related to each other. Once an ontological approach is accepted to do a research, then the epistemology and methodology should be in line with it. One reason of the fact that there are different applications of methodology can be related to positivism, and the confusion qualitative research faces. It is possible that most researchers are confused to distinguish qualitative techniques due to misconceptions about them. The reason behind this might be that different departments in different universities might have different approaches to qualitative research. There is not a standard set, such as not using quantitative procedures during a qualitative study. This can be overcome with quality education where more time and practice goes into qualitative researching.

#### 4.2.2. “Validating” qualitative analysis

The issues of reliability and validity is a discussion matter in qualitative research. Reliability is discussed later in the analysis; however, there are some concepts that refer to reliability in qualitative approach. So it can be said that validity is a much more controversial topic to discuss. Since validity implies a sort of standardization, it is difficult to implement it in qualitative research. Also, one important aspect of qualitative approach is that it allows flexibility in research, therefore, trying to standardize studies is contradictive to the ontology to some extent. It is an option to get the help of experts or other researchers for the coding or the analysis process in general, however, this should not be a precondition for a study to be valid. It is seen that the example theses used more than one coder to establish the validity, or consulted for expert’s opinions for their interview questions. “L” is a PhD dissertation in Journalism and “I” and “T” are PhD and Master’s theses, respectively, both written in Education.

“As described above, the validity of content analysis in this study is ensured by two independent researchers doing the coding procedures.”-L, Journalism

“To ensure the validity in coding, the expert opinion is benefited from.”-T, Education

“According to this, the interview form is ensured by expert opinions that it is comprised of questions that enable the [participants] to express their opinions. This way, the content validity of the interview form is tried to be ensured.”-I, Education

“The data which are transferred to interview forms are read and evaluated one by one by the researchers. One expert from the field is consulted for their opinions to ensure the validity of the data transferred to interview forms.”-K, Education

Other than these, in 2 theses, the validity in qualitative research is explained. As mentioned before, since it is difficult to standardize the process or results of qualitative studies, the most suitable way to reach to validity is to report the research



process in detail and to include direct quotations from the interviews. Thesis “Y” is a PhD dissertation and in this thesis, how the validity and reliability of qualitative research should be assessed is discussed in detail. Thesis “I” is also a PhD dissertation written in Education field.

“In qualitative research the principle of the flexibility of the researcher is an important gain regarding the validity. ... Reporting the gathered data in detail and the researcher explaining how they reached to the results are among the important criteria for validity in a qualitative study.”-Y, Business Administration

“Also, for the sake of the study’s validity, direct quotations from the views of [participants], which the codes and categories are comprised of, are given.”-I, Education

It can be said that in qualitative research, there is a need for validating and this is mostly done by referring to expert opinions or having more than one coder. For quantitative content analysis, it is common to use more than one coder and measures such as inter-coder reliability. For qualitative content analysis, it is also acceptable for a researcher to consult their interview questions, coding process etc., however, there is not a need for a different coder for coding process to validate the one that has already been done by the researcher of the study.

#### **4.2.3. Misunderstanding of the techniques**

One other important difficulty faced in conducting research is found to be the misunderstanding in the use of techniques. For example, in 4 of the studies, while the researchers claim they are using in-depth interview as their research technique, some or most of the interviews took place online. This is also a controversial issue as sometimes it may not be possible to conduct a face-to-face interview, and the only possibility is to use video calling. It is highly possible for certain research topics to use different applications of a technique, however, the reason for these applications should be made clear in the study. In three of these studies, the so-called interview took place in e-mail form. It would be more acceptable if they were conducted via

video calling because even if it is not the best solution, at least there is a chance to see the impressions of the interviewee. But, with e-mail, even this is not possible. The valuable relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is the most powerful when the procedure is done face-to-face. Thesis “N” is a Master’s thesis about refugees, and “D” is a Master’s thesis written in Education field, whereas “AH” and “AL” are both PhD dissertations written in Anthropology and in defense studies, respectively.

“Three of the interviews have been conducted personally and two interviews via video calling. Each of the interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes and all the data from interviews have been afterwards transcribed.”-N, Media and Communication

“Three options are offered to teachers to participate in the interview. First option is responding interview questions sent in writing. The second option is to conduct the interview by video chat via internet on a scheduled day and time. The third option is to conduct the interview via a communication app through internet. All of the teachers preferred the first option and chose to respond in writing.”-D, Education

“I had a short close ended interview with five experienced woman practitioners. ... Both questionnaire and participant responses were electronic. I emailed the questionnaire on the [date] and received the responses on the [date].”-AH, Anthropology

“With guidance of experts, opinions and suggestions are shared via e-mail with environmental security expert working in [institution name] in the USA between [dates].”-AL, Defense

Internet is now a major part of the human life in most of the world, therefore, it was inevitable for it not to find its way into social sciences. Thacker and Dayton (2008) argues that Internet is able to richen the qualitative research in terms of interview technique. They also state that internet-based interviews have both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of it is that it is more economic in terms

of cost and time. However, if the interview is conducted via a media such as e-mail, this could cause the data to be less in depth and immediate than face to face interviews (Thacker & Dayton, 2008). During face to face interviews, the researcher has the opportunity to probe the answers the participants give. Also, they have the advantage of reading the participant's body language, observing their gestures and the like. Without this interaction, an important part of the data is missed, and the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee becomes static.

It is seen that in some theses, characteristics of methods in use can get confused. "A" is a Master's thesis which focuses on material usage in Education, "G" is a PhD dissertation about language learning, and "AG" is also a PhD dissertation about employees.

"Research's study group is comprised of three people in total which one artist-art educator from ... Department of Art, one artist-art educator from ... Department of Visual Arts, one artist-art educator from ... Department of Art."-A, Education

"In the study, four participants were randomly selected to take part in the interview process, which is the second step to gather a detailed and more specific data and ensure the data gathered from the questionnaires. Individual interviews were conducted and took five to ten minute sessions in the researcher's office."-G, Education

"Second phase is the data collection phase and interviews are held with 19 people. ... The interviews of the study lasted approximately 15 minutes ..."-AG, Business Administration

It is seen that methods are not being conducted as they should be. While conducting qualitative interviews, in order to deepen the understanding of a phenomenon, usually, the sessions should be much longer than five or ten minutes to reach to a meaning. Similarly, in qualitative research, random sampling is not used as a sampling technique. The example of "A" is controversial, as three interviews seem

few even for a qualitative research, though if these interviews provided enough information to reach saturation about the data, then this number is more than enough.

To shift the focus to the subject of this study, it is seen that 19 of the theses mentioned and explained the definition and features of content analysis, and from this number, 13 of them mentioned the definition and features of qualitative content analysis. Only in 6 theses, both content and qualitative content analysis are described. In 7 theses, it is conveyed that content analysis is used or should be used as a quantitative technique. Even though these theses claim to be qualitative, the reason quantitative content analysis is used is caused by a misunderstanding. “T” is a Master’s thesis written in an Education field, “AL” is a PhD dissertation and “AD” is a Master’s thesis written in Journalism and is about the approach of the press.

“Content analysis, as a systematic and objective analysis method, is to describe and quantify the incidents.”-T, Education

“Content analysis is the process of acquiring quantitative data from analyzing a written or verbal text and after, reaching to concepts and relationships using these data.”-AL, Defense

“The purpose in content analysis method is to determine and count the frequencies of certain characteristics or categories in any text.”-AD, Journalism

Content analysis was a quantitative technique at first, however, after its extensive use in 1940s and 1950s, its qualitative counterpart started to be discussed. Even Berelson mentioned it in his book. It is thought that this misunderstanding is unacceptable as qualitative content analysis has a considerable history for its use.

#### **4.2.4. Vagueness in definitions**

In a study, the sampling technique, the method, and the characteristics of the sample should be defined and the process should be explained as to be transparent to make the researcher accountable for their publication. In this sense, it is seen that this practice is an important aspect of research process. In 40 theses the sample is

somewhat mentioned, and in 27 of them some of the features (demographic, characteristic) of the sample is declared. Also, in 22 theses, the sampling technique is mentioned. However, some of the theses do not define how their sampling technique is employed. What is expected is one generic sentence to explain what the mentioned sampling technique means. Thesis “O” is a Master’s thesis focusing on educational administration, and “D” is a Master’s thesis written in Education field.

“When determining the instructors interviewed, it was paid attention to be in accordance with the approach of the research and to serve the purpose better. For this reason, it was considered that the interviewees were the ones that the researcher could interview with intimately.”-O, Education

“Teachers who works under the Turkish Republic Ministry of National Education and have worked in ... for at least one year are chosen for the sample ... In the second stage, teachers who were representative of the sample were identified among the respondents who answered the questionnaire, and these teachers were asked questions about the use of materials in the courses.”-D, Education

It is seen that, although practically these researchers explained their sample, there is a need for clarification on how they decided to use *that* sample. Even though it can be speculated which kind of sampling they used to create their samples, it would have been better to see the researchers explain. This way the transparency and the accountability mentioned before would be reached, and the studies would be more understandable.

There are also a number of theses that described the difference in sampling in qualitative research. It is seen that in 6 theses, this issue is discussed. There seems to be different approaches to the topic, however, different points of view are valuable and important in qualitative research, and it is seen that the general idea is kept in all of them. “AL” and “L” are PhD dissertations in defense studies and journalism, respectively, and “AP” and “T” are Master’s theses written in Education.

“However, the selection of the sample is different due to the nature of qualitative research. For example, ... random sampling technique is not used in most qualitative research. It is not possible to present a technique that will be valid in qualitative studies and be used in every study.”-AL, Defense

“Sampling in qualitative studies requires determining the participants which will contribute the most to the study.”-T, Education

“In non-probabilistic sampling, the researcher chooses a sample from the universe within the frame of the criteria they specified; in purposeful sampling, which is a type of non-probabilistic sampling, the researcher decides which unit goes into the sample according to their purpose and judgment.”-L, Journalism

“Selection of the sample is a little different in qualitative research than in quantitative research. First of all, the in-depth analysis in qualitative research makes it difficult to use a big sample.”-AP, Education

Last but not least, since this study focuses on content analysis, it is important to define and explain the kind of content analysis in the studies. Again, in most theses, this is taken into consideration, with some of the studies explaining in detail how content analysis is done, while others just mentioning it as the analysis technique and not elaborating on the topic. “P” and “Q” are both Master’s theses. “P” analyzes the content of videos, whereas “Q” focuses on students. “R” is a PhD dissertation about nationalism.

“Content analysis of videos and YouTube channels has been done to evaluate new publishing factors and the language used in the production of interactive videos.”-P, Communication

“In this study, the raw data obtained by participants completing the statement of ... were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques.”-Q, Education

“In the section where ... perceptions were analyzed, literature and archive research were done based on the secondary data research technique. The content analysis method, which is one of the qualitative research techniques, has been conducted on the detected material from the archive research.”-R, Political Science and Public Administration

None of these 3 theses explained further what content analysis is and how it is done regarding the study. Giving a brief and clear definition of the method would suffice, since methodology is one of the most important aspects of a research. Researchers might think, since most of the readers of these are academicians and experienced researchers; just mentioning the method is comprehensible. This might even be the case; however, when writing a research’s methodology, researchers should be clearer and more explanatory.

#### **4.2.5. Ethical appropriateness**

This theme refers to following ethical rules in social sciences such as citing a work properly, protecting human participants’ confidentiality, making them anonymous, having an Ethics Commission approval. Aside from these, under this theme, informing participants of the study and taking their consent for procedures such as voice recording are taken into consideration. Especially for those studies which employed interviews, in-depth interviews, focus groups etc., there should be both the approval of the Ethics Commission and consent of the participants. Thesis “D” and “E” are both Master’s theses written in Education. Thesis “F”, on the other hand, is a Master’s written in Psychology.

“To conduct the questionnaire and the interview, firstly, an application was made to ... University Ethical Committee. The required permission for the study was given by ... University Ethical Committee on its ... dated meeting.”-D, Education

“Then, permission of the Research Center for Applied Ethics of ... University was provided for the current study.”-E, Education

“Before starting data collection, ... University Human Subjects Ethics Committee Application was done. Data collection via interviews was started following the approval from the committee dated ... and issued with the ... number.”-F, Psychology

The university names and approval dates are kept confidential due to a possible indication of the thesis. It is seen that studies from different universities declared the approval of the committee. In terms of ethical stances took in this study, it should be clearly expressed that there is absolutely no intent to put blame on any studies since graduate theses are highly under the control of the institutions they are being studied, and this study also promises to protect the writers’ anonymity and their studies’ content. The aim here is to draw attention to the importance of stating these protocols in the theses. It is satisfactory to see that some theses inform their reader about it. “D” is a Master’s thesis about teaching and “G” is a PhD dissertation in Education.

“A consent form about their voluntary participation in the study was sent to the participants together with the questionnaire. In the consent form, it is clearly stated that they have the right to not participate to or discontinue the questionnaire. It is also stated that their personal information, under no circumstances will be shared and will be used only for the study.”-D, Education

“... [participants] were given detailed information about the study, the purpose of the study, the methods used, and the confidentiality component were clearly mentioned and they were required to fill a consent form that includes information about their contact information and states that they take part in the study voluntarily...”-G, Education

As mentioned before, getting the consent of the participants is crucial. It can be seen that studies with human participants almost always used a consent form, or detailed information was given to the participants about the study and they were informed that their presence in the study is completely voluntary. Writing about these procedures shows that these researchers are aware of their ethical responsibilities.



It is also important to ask for permission to use voice or video recording. It is seen that in 16 theses, the research technique used is interview or focus group. In total, in 9 of the theses, it is stated that a recorder is used, and again in total, in 7 of the theses, it is declared that the permission of the participants is gotten. “A” is a Master’s thesis written in Education. Thesis “H” and “T” are both PhD dissertations written in Education

“During the interview, a voice recorder was used with the artist-art educators’ permission and the interviews were recorded.”-A, Education

“The focus group interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and then the data are written and analyzed by the researcher.”-H, Education

“In addition, it was explained to teacher candidates that the interviews will be recorded with camera, and it was asked if this situation constitutes a problem for them and asked for their permission about this.”-I, Education

Informing the participants about the confidentiality of the study, their voluntary participation, and asking for their permission to record the interview is crucial. One thing that is also crucial is to declare these steps in the study. It is believed that these are too important to be overlooked in academic studies.

Thesis “Y” is a good example for the right ethical behavior that should be adopted during every study. In this thesis, how the researcher approached their interviewees is explained. This is important to build the needed trust between the researcher and the participant. And this researcher took their ethical responsibility very seriously.

“During interviews, recording was paused where the interviewee did not want it to be recorded. Again, during interview process, when the interviewee wanted to change or correct their statements, their demand was not refused.”-Y, Business Administration

Another important aspect of ethics is getting the permission of the researcher when the tool they developed will be used by the author of the study. “E”, “D” and “AO” are all Master’s theses written in Education.

“Initially, the permission to use TPACK, TISE, and ITOE was granted from the authors of original surveys.”-E, Education

“Said questionnaire is adapted to this study within the knowledge and written permission of the author.”-D, Education

“In this regard, the instrument [the original author] used in his research ... was used with several changes, which is introduced in the next part. [The original author] was contacted and asked for permission to implement the instrument for the sake of the research ethics.”-AO, Education

One of the most essential ethical responsibilities is to provide confidentiality for the participants. This goes hand in hand with anonymity. It is seen that in 8 of the theses, the anonymity is emphasized, and in 2 of them, the confidentiality is mentioned. “G” and “I” are PhD dissertations written in Education, and “Z” is also a PhD thesis written in Psychology.

“All the participants were assured that the procedure and the data gathered from the participants would be confidential and used for the research purpose only.”-G, Education

“It is indicated by the researcher that the names and information of [the participants] will not be shared with anyone and that at the end of the research, nicknames will be used instead of their names.”-I, Education

Also in thesis “Z”, the anonymity is taken care of by giving the participants names of colors (green, purple, yellow, maroon, etc.). As mentioned before, in 16 theses, the research technique used is interview, so anonymity was expected to be of higher concern in each study. There is no suspicion that the theses which did not declare their confidentiality principles acted unethically. However, it would be more satisfactory if these considerations were written in the study as interviewees are prone

to trust and tell the researcher about their personal issues. In this matter, here lies a great responsibility for the academia and student researchers to get in the habit of making these principles visible for others.

There is an issue which is coded as “ethically questionable”. In thesis “AN”, the researcher goes in the field to conduct interviews. Since they are an outsider in terms of the place the interviews took place, the participants seem hesitant to agree to an interview. So, the researcher chooses to flex their technique and decides to have informal conversations rather than interviews.

“As for the fieldwork I conducted in [place] over several weeks, my research consisted in interviews with [participants], numerous conversations, as well as my own observations of the various junctures that make up the sales process. Since many [potential participants] were hesitant toward a more formal interview, I ended up prioritizing conversations whereby I would approach a [potential participant], inform them roughly about the scope of my research, and then go about inquiring into the intricacies of the sales process.”-AN, Cultural Studies

In qualitative research, this procedure might be acceptable, however, the ethical issue is that the researcher claims that they gave the specifics of the research “roughly” to their participants. Explaining the research in detail is an ethical responsibility and for this study, it is arguable if the researcher did the right thing.

One other thing that caught the attention of the researcher is that there are some theses that conducted their research with school children. To support the statement before, it is checked whether or not these theses got a permission from the underage children’s families or teachers. However, such a procedure is not stated in any of them. It is important to get the permission of adults or of people of age for a study, to get the children’s is immensely important. It is thought that these theses have the appropriate permissions, but, it must be declared, especially since it concerns the children.

Being ethical is one of the most important characteristics of a study. Therefore, there might not be a separate methodology section for a study, which is an indication of different problems, but if there are human participants, the researcher must indicate that necessary permissions were taken. It is apparent that no study can be done without getting these permissions from relevant authorities. However, when it is thought, that even for this study, where there are no interviews and human participants, getting the approval of the Committee was an obligation. The importance of indicating these is that it is an ethical responsibility, a liability even, for the researcher to set an example for future researchers, to make their research accountable and transparent. Since the application is included in the research process, it must be declared, even in one sentence, that the necessary procedures were taken.

#### **4.2.6. Primary references**

Reference/Citation category refers to its literal meaning where in studies when other studies are mentioned, they are cited according to the citation system used in the study. Whether American Psychological Association (APA) or Chicago citation system is used is not the interest of this study, but which studies and researchers are cited is. This is especially important to understand which studies are cited mostly to define and explain content analysis. In this sense, both Turkish and foreigner researchers are paid attention to. It is seen that methodology researchers who are from education discipline such as Balcı, Bogdan and Biklen, Karasar, Yıldırım and Şimşek; from sociology discipline such as Patton, Kuş, Creswell, Denzin and Lincoln; from psychology discipline such as Bilgin, Kvale; from political science discipline such as Gökçe are among the reference guides to define and explain the qualitative research process and content analysis. Miles and Huberman, Strauss and Corbin, and Neuman are also among the researchers who are referenced in theses.

It is pleasing to see so many content analysts' studies as references. This shows that, although there might be a misunderstanding as how to conduct content analysis, it and its contributors are being recognized more with each passing day. Researchers from various disciplines (psychology, sociology, communications, and political science) such as Berelson, Holsti, Kracauer, Lasswell, and Weber are among the

pioneers of the method whereas Elo and Kyngäs, Hsieh and Shannon, Krippendorff, Schreier, and Mayring are noteworthy researchers which specifically study content analysis. This fact indicates the researchers studying content analysis in Turkey are on the right path despite qualitative content analysis being recent in comparison to its quantitative counterpart.

#### **4.2.7. Making “reliable” and reaching trustworthiness**

Validity and reliability and how to achieve them have been a complicated issue in qualitative research for some time. This is one of the facts that is clearly seen in the analysis. Even though most theses claim qualitative content analysis is employed, some also uses reliability measures such as inter-coder reliability. To be exact, in 16 of the theses, reliability-validity issue is mentioned, in 7 of the theses, the inter-coder reliability is mentioned and in 5 of the theses, how reliability is achieved in qualitative research is discussed. Thesis “T” is a Master’s thesis in education about primary school children, and “H” is a PhD dissertation about the counselors.

“Reliability is calculated using the formula set forth by Miles and Huberman considering the comparison of agreements and disagreements. ... With this formula the coding reliability [for a concept] is calculated as 92.85, and [for another concept] 94.44.”-T, Education

“Data are analyzed with qualitative content analysis by a second researcher, and reliability is ensured by comparing coding number and percentiles.”-H, Education

These theses used descriptive statistical calculations, however, in this study, this measurement is not seen as part of the analysis process; because it is thought that qualitative research should only include qualitative material. However, in quantitative content analysis, it is expected from the analysis to show statistical formulas and measures; and calculation of reliability, both intra- and inter-coder, is a step in the process.

There are also 14 theses in the sample which stated that mixed methods research is conducted. Some of them described it as combining qualitative and

quantitative approaches. For these examples, it is possible to use inter-coder reliability measurements. “L” and “M” are both PhD dissertations in Journalism and Political Science, respectively.

“However, as Yüksel et al. state that in situations where there are numerous categories and open ended statements, a great majority of aforementioned methods might pose a problem. Therefore, while conducting content analysis, Poindexter and McCombs’ *coefficient of compatibility* is used in terms of inter-coder reliability.”-L, Journalism

“An inter-coder reliability check was conducted on 10% of parliamentary (35) texts and 5% (60) of media documents.”-M, Political Science

In this study, the term trustworthiness is used instead of validity or reliability, with some other theses as well. In general, in qualitative research, trustworthiness is reached through detailed explanation of the entire research process. Theses “B” and “K” are PhD dissertations written in Education, “AM” is a Master’s thesis written about refugees, and “AA” is also a Master’s thesis written in Education.

“To increase the validity-reliability of the qualitative study, primarily, to ensure the internal reliability, direct quotations from participants’ opinions were given in the findings chapter for reporting the analyses.”-K, Education

“In a study which conducts a qualitative design, presenting every stage of data collection process in detail plays a critical role in ensuring the reliability of the study.”-B, Education

“Qualitative analysis relies on quotations, comments, and anecdotes to provide evidence for arguments.”-AM, International Relations

“Stating that the reliability of qualitative research can be expressed with terms such as credibility, dependability, suitability, transferability and authenticity, for Elo et al., it is important to explain each of the reliability of preparation, organization and presenting the findings stages of qualitative content analysis. To that end, in every stage of our study, from data collection to interpreting

the findings, writing the procedures took place in detail is paid attention to.”- AA, Education

It should be explained that thesis “K” states that mixed methods is used in the study. Therefore, it is understandable that the term “reliability” is used, however, it is also valuable to encounter a mixed methods study which also signifies the importance of direct quotations to make the study trustworthy. In this sense, it can be said that while some studies have reached to an all-qualitative understanding, others are still using quantification in qualitative content analysis. The fact that some studies are still quantifying qualitative data can be, again, associated with the power of positivism. The understanding that qualitative research can be “valid” only if it is supported by quantitative data is something to be abandoned. With qualitative method still rising, all researchers, both novice and experienced, should start to change their views of it and try to accept that “qualitative data and analysis only” is sufficient.

#### **4.2.8. Prioritizing structure**

The analysis showed that almost every study that is analyzed is different in terms of their structure. It is seen that only half of the theses wrote an introduction sentence or paragraph for the method section. This is caused by different reasons. For example, some studies do not have a separate methodology section where the entire process is explained. Instead, the method process is covered only in introduction chapters as sub-headings, or even in some cases, there is no signal as to starting to explain the methodology of the study. “J” is a Master’s thesis about civil war.

“Before the summary of the content, methodology of this thesis needs to be explained.”-J, International Relations

There are considerable number of other theses that did not separate the methodology chapter. In these theses, methodology sections are mostly in introduction chapters and most of them are included as a sub-heading. However, some of them did not create one, and, like in “J”, the methodology is just explained in the text.

This issue could have different reasons to it; however, it has been caught in the attention of the researcher since the focus is especially on methodology chapters of theses. There cannot be a distinction made such as degree, university or program as this practice is seen in theses written in various universities and programs, and both in Master's and PhD degrees. By not having a separate section, the analysis process is slowed down because of the searching of methodology in the entire thesis.

Another important issue with methodology chapters in some theses, is that they seem to not receive the importance they need. This means that they are not comprehensive enough to fully understand what has been done in the study. One other thing that has been caught the attention of the researcher is that the methodology sections are much more comprehensive and written in detail in PhD theses, independently from university and department. The reason behind this could be that doctoral studies in general are more in-depth in detail and crucial for one's academic career. However; this does not indicate insignificance toward Master's degrees. Ultimately, a Master's degree is needed to start a PhD degree.

Regardless of the rules of thesis writing in different graduate institutions, not having a separate methodology section, or having a very insufficient one, indicates insignificance and this is not appropriate in terms of structure and research. This can affect all parts of the study. Methodology is the heart of a study; it directs the research process. If it is not given the importance it requires, then the findings and analyses are also called into question. It is seen from the analysis that these kinds of theses, with insufficient methodologies, also yield unsatisfying results.

In conclusion, it can be said that there are many differences in methodology sections between one thesis and another. In some, research questions, hypotheses (if any), assumptions of the studies are mentioned in the methodology chapter, whereas, most of them covered these topics in Introduction chapters. Some explained the research process, which method is used, which data generation technique is used elaborately, while some others mentioned these briefly.



#### 4.2.9. Use of language

The ontology of an approach usually affects every aspect of the conducted research since it is, in a way, the philosophy of it. Therefore, methods and techniques, as well as the language in use are closely related with ontology. The most important aspect of this theme is that even though most studies are identified as qualitative, there is not a consideration for the use of language. For example, data “collection”, rather than data “generation” is used mostly in the studies. However, this is understandable since most qualitative research books and studies also use the term data collection. “A” and “C” are both Master’s theses written in Education and Public Relations, respectively. “Content analysis is used to analyze the data, collected through interview, which is a qualitative research method, data collection technique.”-A, Education

“One of the most important stages of a scientific research process is data collection.”-C, Public Relations

Other than these, the term “data collection” is used mostly in sub-headings.

Nevertheless, there are a few theses that used an appropriate language. “B” is a PhD thesis and it is about course books.

“However, in qualitative research, there is not a goal to generalize research results to the population. Therefore, to not contradict to the goal of qualitative research, it is thought that population term is not correct.”-B, Education

It is clearly seen from the examples that there is a need to improve the understanding of the language in qualitative research. This need of awareness towards the language of a study could possibly indicate a very powerful effect of a certain paradigm. However, there is another thesis that used a qualitative language and also explained why. “T” is a Master’s thesis written in an Education field and the study includes primary school children. In this thesis, it is mentioned that using a “sample” is not preferred, rather a study group is created.

“Sampling in qualitative study requires determining the participants which will contribute the most to the study. In this study, since there is not a concern to generalize, universe, which is the big mass that gathered data are generalized, and sampling, which has the sufficiency to represent the big mass, are not used; rather a study group, in which the findings are evaluated in their own subjectivity, is created.”-T, Education

It seems that, among some qualitative researchers, there is an understanding that since qualitative approach is different from quantitative approach, some concepts should be different, too. The researcher of this study also agrees with this statement, however, it was not of knowledge that using a sample is considered to be contradictory to the qualitative approach. It is exciting to see such examples of qualitative research. These examples are in the minority, only 2 out of 42 theses stated such sensitivity; however, they are also valuable. Furthermore, the years of these 2 theses are on the both ends of the time frame of this study. This shows that it is not a new approach to use certain concepts for qualitative research. This understanding has been around for almost at least a decade; still, it seems qualitative language has difficulty in becoming widespread. It is surprising to see that Education field got the lead in both qualitative content analysis and qualitative understanding. One solution for the falling behind of qualitative approach can be cooperative studies held to popularize this approach.

#### **4.2.10. Use of technology**

In an age where technological devices hold a very important share of the daily life of a person, it is simply natural to use it in science. Quantitative researchers have been using software programs to do their analyses for quite a long time. On the other hand, because qualitative approach gained popularity much after quantitative approach, the development of a software program was also delayed. However, the programs developed to help the qualitative data analysis have come a long way. It is obvious that these programs cannot do all of the analysis by themselves, but they are very helpful for data management and coding. With this, it was expected to see the majority of the theses would use software. Although, it is on the contrary to this expectation. In 16 out of 42 theses, it is stated that any software program is used for

the analysis. In this 16 theses, in 7 of them, SPSS is used; in 5 of them, MAXQDA; in 3, NVivo; in 1, ATLAS.ti and in 2 of them, different software programs are used. Some theses used two different programs because they have both quantitative and qualitative data. It is seen that most of them did not use or declare using a software. “M” is a PhD dissertation in Education and “AO” is a Master’s thesis in Education.

“In both stages of the content analysis, qualitative and quantitative, software specially developed for studies on content analysis (NVIVO) was used to speed up the process. For the regression analysis, STATA was employed.”-M, Political Science

“The data were analyzed with the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 23). The aim is to provide descriptive statistics of ... To triangulate the quantitative data ... the [data] are collected and studied carefully via ATLAS.ti (Version 1.5.4)”-AO, Education

Some of them used software only for their quantitative data. This is the possible reason why there are 7 theses that used SPSS. One of the theses which state that they used SPSS for their quantitative data also stated that they only conducted qualitative content analysis for their qualitative data. There is no mention of a software. “G”, “D” and “K” are theses written in Education related fields. “G” and “K” are PhD dissertations, whereas “D” is a Master’s thesis.

“Quantitative data analyses were performed by using SPSS 20 statistical software program.”-G, Education

“In this study, quantitative methods are used for the analysis of the questionnaire data. SPSS 20 statistical program is used for data analysis. First, descriptive statistical analyses are done consisting of frequencies and percentiles and mean.”-D, Education

“In this study, the data are gathered with the help of a questionnaire that is adapted to Turkish (quantitative dimension) and with a semi-structured interview form (qualitative dimension) that is prepared after. For the quantitative data analysis, the statistical calculations are done with SPSS 20.0

and LISREL package programs and for qualitative data analysis, qualitative content analysis is conducted.”-K, Education

It is seen that MAXQDA is used in 5 theses and NVivo in 3. These two programs are mainly used in qualitative research and have more or less the same features to help with the analysis. However, the reason MAXQDA is used commonly by students might be because it is fairly cheaper than NVivo, also MAXQDA can be used in some university computers. “Z” is a PhD dissertation and “F” is a Master’s thesis, both written in Psychology. “H” is also PhD dissertation written in Education.

“Later on, the data was analyzed in line with the rules of deductive qualitative content analysis by utilizing MAXQDA.”-Z, Psychology

“Inductive Qualitative Content Data Analysis was conducted on this anonym data via MAXQDA software program.”-F, Psychology

“In the data analysis process, MAXQDA qualitative data analysis program is used by the researcher to gain time and to organize the process.”-H, Education

There is one thesis in which the researcher created their own data analysis software for the analysis. This exceeds the scope of this study, however, it is astounding to encounter such a situation in a social science thesis. This Master’s thesis (“C”) is written in Public Relations department.

“A computer based data analysis software is developed fitting the necessities of this study. This software allows for data entry and serves as a database that visualizes the data outcomes. The program is coded in C# language using Microsoft Visual Studio 2010 platform.”-C, Public Relations

Another different example is a thesis in which a deductive approach is used and codes and themes are created beforehand with a software program. After this “map”, for the second phase of the analysis, MAXQDA is used. “Y” is a PhD dissertation about a theory in Business Administration.

“Codes and themes that will be used to analyze the data set are created with ImindMap program. After the antecedent working phase ... proceeded to the

second phase. The use of computer based qualitative data analysis program MAXQDA constitutes this second phase.”-Y, Business Administration

In qualitative research, difference is deemed valuable, as it enriches the analysis. Furthermore, researchers should be able to extend their knowledge and possibilities about various programs, tools, and approaches.

To conclude the analysis, it can be said that positivism has been, and still is, a broadly used, strong approach in almost all science fields. However, especially in social sciences, its effect remains despite the development of opposing qualitative paradigms, such as social interactionism, and feminist approach. This said process first started in the West, so it would be inappropriate to explain the current situation there about qualitative research. However, speaking from experience, it can be said that in Turkey, there is still rigidity toward qualitative studies. For example, for a psychology class for third year undergraduate students in 2014, the instructor still prepared the midterm as a multiple choice test. What is more surprising was the entire class being content about this decision. Whereas, in the same semester, for an anthropology class, the instructor was expecting her students to conduct an interview, then analyze the findings and report it as final assignment. It was not odd for these psychology students to take this test, because this specific science field is immensely affected by positivism. This is a summary of the effect positivism has in Turkey. It is relatively new to conduct entirely qualitative researches, let alone using an appropriate language. What needs to be done is to raise awareness about this issue, that qualitative research does not accept positivism, in fact, it opposes it. That way, the qualitative understanding will improve and so will the wording qualities of studies conducted with this approach.

In general, from the analysis, it is seen that mostly PhD dissertations have the most detailed methodology chapters. However, mainly all of the theses lack some properties here or there, naturally. The ones that are deemed well in this thesis are of the exceptions. So, it can be asked “What is better about these theses?” It is seen that neither the university nor the year have an effect on this. It cannot be generalized, although, it is seen that most theses are written in educational sciences and other

departments related to it. Therefore, it is not a surprise to see one or two theses from this field which have the most thorough methodology chapters. The field of the study does not emerge as the primary reason to have better methodologies; however, it might be a contributor to this fact. When checked structurally, these again have better outlines in terms of having both a separate methodology chapter and parts explaining the framework. Content-wise, these theses approached the process of the research in more detail, making clear the definitions and stages of their research and research technique, especially content analysis. This approach to the process also made these comprehensible and informative. Maybe not all of them have the same understanding of content analysis, but they have satisfying quality. For example, some defined every step of content analysis, where some even mentioned types of coding. One last thing in common in these theses is that their analyses are in line with their method. This means, if they declared they are going to use qualitative techniques, then there are no quantifications in the analysis.

As mentioned before, methodology is the heart of a research, therefore, without giving attention to it and its parts, studies might become irrelevant. A building should have concrete foundations to be enduring. To think the building as the research, foundations are ontology-epistemology-methodology triangle. Having one of them missing might cause the building to collapse. Special importance should be given to research methodology lectures to educate researchers about the foundations.



## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

There are certain paradigms that reserve their places in social sciences. Even though the use of qualitative approach started its rise in the 1980s, positivism is still an important and effective approach in social sciences. First, there was the understanding where there is one reality and science's aim is to discover that. However, qualitative paradigms proposed that there is not one reality, and that it changes according to every individual's perspective of the world. After years, however, as Stenius, Mäkelä, Miovisky and Gabrheík (2017) state, it is still somewhat challenging to conduct and publish qualitative research. They express that although conducting qualitative studies requires the same abilities as quantitative studies, qualitative researchers face prejudice from the scientific community. Stenius et al. (2017) also suggest researchers to define the context of the topic at hand for their data to be significant. Following their suggestion, it is seen important to explain the context of this study. The interpretivist approach of this study allows it to analyze the data carefully within their social and cultural context. It is thought that the culture in academia is the main context that affects the studies. It can be said that this culture still majorly supports quantitative approaches. It is seen that, a considerable number of themes have emerged in this study because of the power of these approaches.

The positivistic academic culture also demonstrates itself as unawareness of the fundamentals of the qualitative paradigm. This unawareness is thought to be the main antecedent of the confusion and misunderstandings which manifested itself in the theses. Claiming that qualitative paradigm allows to quantify the data, measuring inter-coder reliability and counting frequencies while conducting qualitative content analysis are a few of the examples that can be given. It is clearly seen that the ontology, epistemology and methodology of qualitative paradigm are simply not known and used in the appropriate way by the researchers. Therefore, based on the assessment of theses analyzed, it is thought that there is a need to improve qualitative thinking. This improvement should capture all properties of qualitative research. In most theses, it is discovered that, still, qualitative findings are perceived valid and reliable only if they are "supported" by quantitative measures. Qualitative studies are, to use the proper



term, trustworthy without frequencies or inter-coder reliability measurements or other statistical analyses. In qualitative approach, trustworthiness is achieved by explaining the research process in detail. This understanding should be promoted among qualitative researchers, and especially for researchers who wish to conduct qualitative content analysis.

At this point, it should be mentioned that the rise of mixed methods research can be both an advantage and disadvantage for qualitative approach. It is an advantage because, essentially, although mixed methods research has its own paradigm (pragmatism), it does not have a theory, it uses either a qualitative or quantitative dominant approach according to the study's topic (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). This might be helpful in promoting qualitative research. However, the possible disadvantageous part of the rising popularity of mixed methods is the risk of the continuation of confusions and misunderstandings about certain concepts this study is concerned, such as inter-coder reliability and frequencies in qualitative studies. For this, responsibility falls onto the shoulders of both qualitative and mixed methods researchers. This responsibility includes defining and explaining qualitative research and setting examples for it. This way, it will be possible to lessen and overcome the misconceptions mentioned in the analysis.

Aforementioned positivistic academic culture also shows itself in the methodology of the theses. It is seen that the limited knowledge about the ontology and epistemology of qualitative paradigm affects how a technique is conducted. Other than this, it also affects the importance given to the methodology sections of the theses. It is seen that some theses devoted a considerable amount of effort to the chapter, while others did not even create a different section dedicated to it. It can also be said that the theses with separate methodology sections explained their techniques better and more in detail, in general. Others which did not separate the methodology explained very little or, in some cases, not at all. This practice is contrary to the clarity and transparency principles of social science publications. To overcome this problem, methodology classes in undergraduate and graduate programs should be improved in content. These classes should emphasize the importance of methodology in research.

This study tries to offer some pathways for conducting qualitative content analysis. If a researcher, in the future, wishes to conduct this method, they can turn to this study and find out how to do it and how to overcome the difficulties they face during the process. As far as it is known, there has not been a thesis study similar to this one in Turkey which explores the method itself.

This study's research questions are related with identifying how content analysis is used and conducted in qualitative research techniques, and how it is different from quantitative content analysis. Three of the research questions are answered, mainly through the literature review conducted in the first place. It is understood that qualitative content analysis is an analysis technique to discover hidden and deeper meanings from the material in hand. This material can be auditory, visual or in written form. How it is conducted is also answered by the literature review. For this part, different styles of different researchers are given to be able to fully identify the process of qualitative content analysis and make it understood.

Last research question of this study is to discover how qualitative content analysis is understood and conducted in Turkey, in terms of some of the Master's and PhD theses written. For this question, a qualitative content analysis is conducted. With this, it is aimed to identify the process in these theses. The analysis helped to find that in theses which are mentioned, there are some misunderstood points about qualitative content analysis. The researcher of this thesis believes that qualitative content analysis is just qualitative and there is no place for quantifications during the analysis. These quantifications can be, for example, frequencies or inter-coder reliability. The issue with inter-coder reliability is complicated as it indicates more than one researcher studying the same data. It is possible and seen in some qualitative studies. However, the researcher believes that it is also possible to reach meaningful results which reflect the realities of the participants, without the measurement of coder reliability. This can be achieved by both researchers coding the same material, then discussing their analysis results and reaching to a mutual decision about it. This practice can be also helpful for novice researchers.

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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX A

<b>Code</b>	<b>Subject of the Thesis</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>M/PhD</b>	<b>Year</b>
<b>AH</b>	Dance	Anthropology	PhD	2010
<b>AG</b>	Employees	Business Administration	PhD	2011
<b>Y</b>	Theory	Business Administration	PhD	2013
<b>AE</b>	Censorship	Communication	Master's	2016
<b>P</b>	Video production	Communication	Master's	2017
<b>AK</b>	Media	Communication Sciences	Master's	2017
<b>AN</b>	Hospitality	Cultural Studies	Master's	2017
<b>AL</b>	Environment	Defense Management	PhD	2011
<b>AP</b>	Brain storming	Education	Master's	2010
<b>V</b>	Teaching-learning process	Education	Master's	2010
<b>AF</b>	Gender roles	Education	Master's	2011
<b>E</b>	Teachers	Education	Master's	2011
<b>T</b>	Students	Education	Master's	2011
<b>I</b>	Teacher	Education	PhD	2013
<b>H</b>	Counselors	Education	PhD	2014
<b>O</b>	Faculty members	Education	Master's	2014
<b>Q</b>	Students	Education	Master's	2014
<b>A</b>	Material	Education	Master's	2015
<b>K</b>	Change	Education	PhD	2015
<b>W</b>	Course books	Education	PhD	2015
<b>AA</b>	Stories	Education	Master's	2016
<b>G</b>	Language	Education	PhD	2016
<b>AJ</b>	Students	Education	Master's	2017
<b>AO</b>	Language	Education	Master's	2017
<b>B</b>	Course books	Education	PhD	2017
<b>D</b>	Teaching	Education	Master's	2017
<b>U</b>	Newspapers	Education	Master's	2017
<b>J</b>	Civil war	International Relations	Master's	2016
<b>AM</b>	Refugees	International Relations	Master's	2017
<b>L</b>	Media	Journalism	PhD	2011
<b>AD</b>	Media	Journalism	Master's	2014
<b>AI</b>	Learning	Linguistics	Master's	2010

<b>X</b>	Culture	Media and Communication	Master's	2012
<b>N</b>	Refugees	Media and Communication	Master's	2016
<b>S</b>	Media	Media and Cultural Studies	Master's	2010
<b>M</b>	Migrants	Political Science	PhD	2015
<b>R</b>	Nationalism	Political Science and Public Administration	PhD	2014
<b>AB</b>	Cinema	Political Science and Public Administration	Master's	2016
<b>Z</b>	Well-being	Psychology	PhD	2015
<b>F</b>	Human resources	Psychology	Master's	2016
<b>C</b>	Brand salience strategies	Public Relations and Publicity	Master's	2014
<b>AC</b>	Non-governmental organizations	Sociology	PhD	2014



## APPENDIX B



T.C.  
HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
Rektörlük



Sayı : 35853172-300  
Konu : Emetullah Mümine BARKÇİN Hk.

### NÜFUS ETÜTLERİ ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE

İlgi : 07.05.2018 tarih ve 85844849-010.99/00000033650 sayılı yazımız.

Enstitümüz Sosyal Araştırma Yöntemleri Anabilim Dalı yüksek lisans programı öğrencilerinden **Emetullah Mümine BARKÇİN**'in Doç. Dr. İlknur YÜKSEL KAPTANOĞLU danışmanlığında yürüttüğü "Content Analysis In Qualitative Research Techniques" başlıklı tez çalışması, Üniversitemiz Senatosu Etik Komisyonunun 17 Temmuz 2018 tarihinde yapmış olduğu toplantıda incelenmiş olup, etik açıdan uygun bulunmuştur.

Bilgilerinizi ve gereğini saygılarımla rica ederim.

e-İmzalıdır  
Prof. Dr. Rahime Meral NOHUTCU  
Rektör Yardımcısı

Evrakın elektronik imzalı suretine <https://belgedogrulama.hacettepe.edu.tr> adresinden 83f00752-e51a-48d7-87c2-3ca47d6c44f5 kodu ile erişebilirsiniz.  
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Hacettepe Üniversitesi Rektörlük 06100 Sıhhiye-Ankara  
Telefon:0 (312) 305 3001-3002 Faks:0 (312) 311 9992 E-posta:yazimd@hacettepe.edu.tr İnternet Adresi: www.hacettepe.edu.tr



