



ANALYSIS OF THE QUALITATIVE DISSERTATION OUTLINES OF NURSING ANÁLISE DO DELINEAMENTO DAS DISSERTAÇÕES QUALITATIVAS DA ENFERMAGEM ANÁLISIS DEL PERFIL DE LAS TESIS DE CALIDAD DE ENFERMERÍA

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the methodological design of the Nursing dissertations by the proposed criteria by the guidelines of critical review in qualitative research. **Method:** descriptive study, a retrospective documentary with 25 dissertations published in the years 2006-2010 on the web site of the Master's Degree in Nursing Graduation Program, Public University of Paraná / Brazil. **Results:** all essays clearly demonstrate the object of study. As for the procedural rigor it was not identified the procedure for data collection in three studies. In analytical rigor we perceived absence of inductive analysis and clear identification of the results in five surveys. In auditability, most dissertations present limitations in the application of track-making. In the global rigor we observed that no dissertation meets all components of reliability, only the credibility components. **Conclusion:** it was considered that the dissertations study partially meet the criteria proposed by the guidelines of critical review in qualitative research. **Descriptrs:** Nursing Research; Qualitative Research; Methodology.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar o delineamento metodológico das dissertações de Enfermagem mediante os critérios propostos pelas diretrizes de revisão crítica em pesquisa qualitativa. **Método:** estudo descritivo, retrospectivo e documental, com 25 dissertações publicadas nos anos de 2006 a 2010 na *web site* do Curso de Mestrado em Enfermagem, do Programa de Pós-Graduação, da Universidade Pública do Estado do Paraná/Brasil. **Resultados:** todas as dissertações demonstram clareza do objeto de estudo. Quanto ao rigor processual não foi identificado o procedimento de coleta de dados em três estudos. No rigor analítico percebeu-se ausência de análises indutivas e identificação dos resultados com clareza em cinco pesquisas. Na auditabilidade a maioria das dissertações apresenta limitações na aplicação da trilha de decisões. No rigor global observou-se que nenhuma dissertação atende todos os componentes de confiabilidade, somente os de credibilidade. **Conclusão:** considerou-se que as dissertações estudadas atendem parcialmente aos critérios propostos pelas diretrizes de revisão crítica em pesquisa qualitativa. **Descritores:** Pesquisa em Enfermagem; Pesquisa Qualitativa; Metodologia.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar el trazado metodológico de las tesinas de Enfermería mediante los criterios propuestos por las directrices de revisión crítica en investigación cualitativa. **Método:** estudio descriptivo, retrospectivo y documental, con 25 tesinas publicadas entre los años 2006 y 2010 en la página web del Curso de Maestría en Enfermería, del Programa de Pos-graduación de la Universidad Pública del Estado de Paraná (Brasil). **Resultados:** todas las tesinas demuestran claridad del objeto de estudio. Respecto al rigor del proceso, no se identificó el procedimiento de recolección de datos en tres estudios. En el rigor analítico se observó una ausencia de análisis inductivos e identificación de los resultados con claridad en cinco investigaciones. En referente a la auditabilidad la mayoría de las tesinas presenta limitaciones en la aplicación de la línea de decisiones. Sobre el rigor global, se observó que ninguna tesina atiende a todos los componentes de confiabilidad, apenas los de credibilidad. **Conclusión:** se consideró que las tesinas estudiadas atienden parcialmente a los criterios planteados por las directrices de revisión crítica en investigación cualitativa. **Descriptores:** Investigación en Enfermería; Investigación Cualitativa; Metodología.

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INTRODUCTION

The scientific production of Brazilian nursing linked to Postgraduate courses (PG), especially *Strictu Sensu*, has contributed to the growth of a corpus of skilled knowledge, directed to the expansion of scientific and technological improvement in health¹. Some studies^{2-3, 5} show the association programs and their collaboration in the acquisition of scientific habitus of nurses capable of enabling conditions for increased skills and competencies to adopt attitudes and reveal their role as researchers. Such attributes converge to form strategies to develop personal and institutional strategies, favoring the partnership between school and society, to prepare them to respond with responsibility and commitment to social, economic and cultural problems.³

In 1978 it was established the National Seminar on Nursing Research / SENPE, directed to the scientific development of the area, it also evidenced the growing commitment of nurse researchers in research activities and their maturation.⁴ In this scenario, we note that the expansion of these capabilities in the formation may be linked to advances in scientific and technological growth, and this requires a wide opening to the diversity and interdisciplinary knowledge, as well as environment that fosters relationships and interactions focused on building knowledge and practices. Therefore, the construction of the research produced in programs *Strictu Sensu* is an essential element in the production of nursing and health.⁵

By including the productions of the area, we observe the direction that sets the preference in the PG for Nursing, by employing the qualitative methods⁶. These preferences arise from the need to understand and prove the existence of phenomena concerning the subjectivity of the health condition. They refer to studies that seek meanings, representations, symbolization, perceptions and viewpoint of the subject studied. The way of thinking of the researcher is based mainly on the perception and human understanding⁸ which seeks to meet the health issues and its peculiar characteristic of a multidisciplinary approach. It is a complex field that requires distinct and integrated knowledge.

Despite the high percentage of use of qualitative research in nursing, it was highlighted in a study the need for monitoring and theoretical study of qualitative research in which aspects are perceived and articulated and there is a suspicion of impoverishment of

the method, considering the lack of rigor in investigations. The approach is based in the suspicion that the investigative model demonstrates difficulties in going beyond a superficial and immediate interpretation of reality, and describes the obvious detriment of the result of a scientific nature.

The conduct of such research requires strict adherence to its design and incurs the search refinement which can be promoted through the adoption systematic and organized strategies of evaluation. The goal here is to delimit the production of knowledge, enabling discoveries of careful studies, with the addition of consistent information for the professional practice of nurses. These considerations refer to the use of judgment criteria as the Critical Review Form: Qualitative Studies, originally developed by the Research Group on Evidence-Based Practice of Occupational Therapy at McMaster University and revised⁹. This includes guidelines that help readers and researchers to complete a critical assessment of qualitative research articles.⁹

With the purpose of showing that the dissertations with a qualitative research design meet the guidelines of rigor and validity as the adapted form of critical review of qualitative research, the aim of this study is:

- To analyze the methodological design of the dissertations of Nursing by the criteria proposed by the critical review guidelines in qualitative research.

METHOD

A descriptive, retrospective documentary study, made in the website of Master's Degree in Nursing Graduate Program in Nursing at a public university in the state of Parana / Brazil. A survey of qualitative summaries of dissertations published in the years 2006-2010.

Adopted as inclusion criteria the research with qualitative research design, related to the topics: adult health, public health, occupational health and mental health, and exclusion criteria quality quantitative and quantitative research related to children and the elderly.

Regarding the selection of the essays we read all abstracts and identified the central characteristics of the research object, objectives and methodological framework. The classification was derived by year of publication and thematic area, which allowed the quantitative grouping.

Data collection was performed by using an adapted form of the Critical Review Guidelines: qualitative research⁹ which has 11 criteria for analysis, of which only six were observed: the object of study, research design, procedural rigor, analytical rigor, auditability and overall rigor. The choice of certain criteria form stems from the need to deepen aspects of rigor in the construction of the research focusing on the application of the methodology and its projection of scientific validity.

The documentary analysis and reinterpretation of abstracts, introduction and methodology as a research unfolded in the following stages: first the critical reading of abstracts, introduction, methodology and results of dissertations available on the web site of the Graduate dissertations produced in the Master Course from 2006 to 2010. The second stage considered how clearly the purpose and objective and/or research questions were, the identification of research design, theoretical perspective and method used to answer the survey questions and procedural rigor to integrate the strategies and methods used by researchers in the collection procedures data.

Data analysis included analytical rigor, auditability and overall rigor. The analytical rigor is defined by the fact whether analyzes were inductive and these subsidized the consistent and reflective results to the data. The auditability relates to the researcher's decision to transform the information into topics and codes. Finally, the overall rigor sought to observe whether the articles presented the four components of reliability, such as credibility, transferability, trustworthiness, and confirmability. The results were presented and were in accordance to the purpose of the research and the design of quantitative studies, using descriptive language and presentation in tables.

As this is a research document whose content is available for the general public, it was not necessary to submit it to the Ethics in Human Research Committee¹⁰.

RESULTS

The results show qualitative analysis of 25 dissertations that met the criteria in the study. We present in Table 1 the quantitative dissertations produced according to thematic areas of the program.

Table 1. Dissertations from the Graduate Program in Nursing / UFPR by subject area, period 2006-2010. Curitiba, Paraná, 2012

Theme	n	%
Adult Health	10	40
Public Health	09	36
Mental Health	03	12
Employee Health	03	12
Total	25	100

Source: Authors, (2012).

Regarding thematic sets, the emphasis is in the area of concentration of adult health in 40% (n = 10) of dissertations in the program, then the public health with 36% (n = 9).

Regarding the analysis of purpose to the object of study, it was found that the productions have clearly articulated the purpose of description and, in most polls, correspond to a total of 92% (n = 23). However, in 8% (n = 2) of these productions, the connection of object of study and

justification demonstrate limitations in the clarity of the purpose of the study.

The identification of the methodological framework of research is evidenced in Table 2, and observe the adoption of various methodological frameworks making a total of 36% (n = 9) of the dissertations. Another prominent aspect is the similarity in demand for use of drawings in phenomenology and descriptive, exploratory study / case study, both accounting for 20% (n = 5).

Table 2. Methodological Framework used in Dissertations of the Graduate Program in Nursing / UFPR in the period 2006-2010. Curitiba, Paraná, 2012.

Methodological Framework	n	%
Phenomenology	05	20
Grounded Theory	02	8
Action Research	03	12
Descriptive exploratory / Case Study	05	20
Descriptive study / oral history	01	4
Others	09	36
Total	25	100

Source: Authors (2012)

In these investigations, we largely chose the use of isolated semi-structured interview technique or the conjugated form, demonstrating its suitability to explore in depth study of a particular issue.

It was found in this clipping that the sampling was based on the deliberate or purposeful choice of the subjects, based on the need of information emerging from the preliminary results. Only in one study, this feature was not observed, which was adopted as a criterion of a systematic sample.

Submission and approval of research projects have been fully met in the dissertations analyzed, which is in accordance to the regulation 196/96 that requires that all research involving human subjects must be submitted to ethical review, privilege that must be met by the authors at the time of submission of journal articles.¹¹

The findings relating to the collection of data show that 88% (n = 22) are clear and detail their description, which allows to know the key elements as the subject, the study site connected to the data, as well as a definition of the role the researcher and the relationship with the subjects explained. Of these, 12% (n = 3) did not clearly explain the data collection, there are limitations in the description of the subjects and the identification of the role, assumptions and judgments of the researcher.

Evidence for procedural rigor as the description of the training of data collectors, time taken to perform the procedures, flexibility in design, methods of data collection and verification of the approach of the subject, pointed to success with a total of 88% (n = 22).

We found that the analytical accuracy was seen in 80% (n = 20) of the theses, however in 20% (n = 5), they do not describe the type of analysis, and the absence of detail in the building up of categories and concept codes . Consequently, the findings are not clear.

The auditability was given as justification for the decisions of the researcher to develop themes and codes from the data. It was noticed enough details with logic for

monitoring data throughout the process of interpretation in 24% (n = 6). Despite the obvious attempt to articulate observations from the data with the literature, it was observed in 28% (n = 7) of the dissertations limitations in conjunction with these concepts. This attribute refers to the state of the art, ie, the sensitivity of the researcher to establish data connections with the reference point, which was identified by aspects related to the use of long text clippings of interviews and little analysis.

Joining the overall rigor of the four components of trustworthiness as credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability were fully met and only the credibility criterion in 100% (n = 25). The other criteria ratify a discrepancy with the parameters analyzed and compliance results for transferability in 72% (n = 18) and lack of reliability and confirmability 100% (n = 25) respectively. These included restrictions on the identification of audit trail or peer review, which allows the points to ratify decisions taken along the search process, followed by the description of the strategies to limit study bias.

DISCUSSION

The scientific production of qualitative dissertations of PG in Nursing included in this study are clear as to the description of the investigated phenomenon, and demonstrate consistency with the criteria proposed by the adapted Guideline form for critical review: qualitative research Letts and Cols⁹. The selected study design was mainly descriptive and / or exploratory, and it configures the subject area of Adult Health and Public Health mostly.

Regarding the parameters of accuracy and validity of the research, there are some limitations in service uniform and complete criteria analyzed as the procedural rigor, analytical rigor, auditability and overall rigor. These developments are in accordance to findings in a study¹¹ about the rigor of qualitative research because it emphasizes the importance of relevance in the selection

of the data, as a basic feature of this type of study and it needs to be linked to the production of consistent results in order to support the view and relevance of explanations of the theories even if they are not definitive but generalizable reached conclusions. It is emphasized that the rigor in qualitative research usually has implications throughout the research process and are associated with each stage of the process.¹²⁻³

The disparity regarding the procedural rigor and compliance criteria indicates the description of how accuracy is achieved in sampling and what are the strategies used to collect data, such as field approximation, limited time to implement the instruments of flexibility in collection methods and clarity in the strategy used by the researcher to approach the participants.

In this respect, the authors¹⁴ state that procedural rigor means precision in the procedure of data collection and self-criticism in order to reduce the bias and misinterpretation and that strategies to guarantee it in qualitative research are associated with auditability, providing a clear description, explanation and justification of how the researcher was interested in the subject, his perspective on the phenomenon studied and detailed procedures for data collection.

Also, the limitations are highlighted in analytical rigor, which is another aspect that has confluence with the issues of auditability, because although it shows a desire to provide information regarding the decisions taken during the data analysis, the description of the various steps involved in the finished model is deficient. A limiting factor was the lack of identification of assumptions, philosophy and the role of the researcher. For auditability to be achieved in terms of methodological congruence, it is emphasized that all decisions described in the transformation of data to a theoretical scheme must be notified and material selection should present the analysis of data and the steps involved in the process description of the information that subsidized the construction of certain themes and categories.¹⁵

The reasoning process of the investigator towards qualitative approaches during the analysis shall consider with a clear description on how he identified the common elements or categories, patterns, themes and data relationships.¹¹ Sometimes, complexity is achieved by establishing an audit trail that tracks the decisions taken in the procedure used, including the development of rules to

transform the data into categories or codes. These steps regarding the verification of the analysis provide evidence that the results are representative of data as a whole.¹⁶ Thus, the audit should include a researcher not involved with the research, to review the process and the product of this, in order to assess the accuracy and the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data.¹⁶

As a final discussed criterion, the findings regarding the overall rigor show that most studies do not identify the four components of reliability. It is noteworthy that establishing reliability implies ensuring quality results, which requires systematic follow-up steps in the construction and analysis of data.

Credibility according to authors such as Valencia and Mora¹³, must be understood as similar criteria for internal validity, transferability and reliability, being analogous to external validity, the confirmability as objectivity. Also expressed as a result of scientific research, quality assessment is considered a strategy in the search for validity and reliability.¹³

The validity is primarily intended to check whether an instrument measures or what is supposed to measure, and reliability is the consistency of an instrument to measure an attribute or concept. These are advocated as relevant to qualitative research, since they are procedural and therefore must follow the entire development of the research and not be checked only at the end of it.¹⁴

Thus, credibility is associated with recognition of results as real and true as much for participating in the study as those who experienced the phenomenon. The confirmability is tied to neutrality in the analysis and interpretation of information, which is achieved when other researchers can follow the trail and identify how the researcher arrived at similar conclusions. Thus, transmissibility is the ability to transfer the results to other contexts or group in future studies.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the design of the dissertations of the Post Graduate Course in Nursing and its compliance to criteria listed on the form adopted, we realize that the main subject area intends to give priority to Adult Health, and we also observed similarities in adoption of study designs that use the philosophical referential for phenomenology, descriptive studies, and exploratory case study, and the use of semi-structured interview technique in most of them.

In all analyzed dissertations, we identified limitations in analytical rigor in relation to the description of the analysis and detailing in the construction of categories, codes and concepts. Also in regard to auditability, the construction abstract concepts has some limitations since they use too much texts and little analysis, which gives poor visibility followed by reference; it also became evident limitations in full compliance criteria relating to the accuracy of the overall respect to the lack of reliability and confirmability.

The main point of the qualitative method is the validity, construction of coherent and relevant instruments for obtaining data. This will be possible through transparency in detailing the steps taken in the study of the composition which gives a higher degree of reliability to the results. Thus, the analytical path with the aid of the adoption of criteria adapted form allowed us to systematically review the methodological criteria and deepen the concepts about rigor in research, yet the relevance of task analytic and critical at every stage of research should be to search intersubjective, inseparable, and philosophically fundamental context to the analysis process. The range of complexity in this regard stresses the importance of establishing an audit trail of internal research, which allows representativeness and reliability of the data. Of equal importance, the search for a judicious attendance verification bias research should allow the confirmability of the data.

The qualification of the formation in *Stricto Sensu*, both in lectures and in the thesis, should be pursued, besides the methodological rigor of the research and development of innovative knowledge search specifically in Nursing. This qualification will certainly reflect in a training of excellence, and consequently in scientific production with a recommendation for placement in journals of impact on the Area of Nursing.

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