

Qualitative Methods in Israel

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Abstract: This paper surveys the evolution and current state of the art of qualitative methods as an academic discipline in Israel. By means of a survey carried out especially for this issue of *FQS*, the paper documents the prevalence of qualitative courses in Israel's institutions of higher learning and other networks which promote qualitative research. In addition, the article presents the findings of a separate survey carried out for this issue of all articles published in the past decade in Israel's foremost behavioural science journal "Megamot". It documents the methods used by Israeli scholars, as well as their new and emerging areas of interest. The article demonstrates that in recent years there has been a steady increase in interest in qualitative research in Israel. Finally, the paper discusses whether national experience shapes the selection of social scientific methods, and comes to the conclusion that it influences the research area studied but does not necessarily affect the methods used.

Table of Contents

- [1. Aims of the Paper](#)
- [2. Evolution of Qualitative Methods in Israel](#)
- [3. Academic Courses](#)
- [4. Other Qualitative Networks](#)
- [5. Qualitative Methods Scientific Literature](#)
- [6. Does National Experience Dictate Choice of Theories and Methods?](#)
- [7. Conclusions](#)

[References](#)

[Author](#)

[Citation](#)

1. Aims of the Paper

This paper surveys the evolution and current state of the art of qualitative methods as an academic discipline in Israel. [1]

The paper has several aims:

- to trace briefly the history of qualitative methods in Israel's social sciences;
- to document the teaching experience and incidence of qualitative courses in Israel's institutions of higher learning by presenting the results of a brief survey;
- to describe other networks in Israel established to promote qualitative research;
- to present the findings of a survey of all articles published during the past decade in Israel's foremost social science journal "Megamot";

- to document the choice of theories and methods used by Israeli scholars, as well as new and emerging areas of interest;
- finally, to discuss whether national experience shapes the use and choice of qualitative methods in the social sciences. [2]

2. Evolution of Qualitative Methods in Israel

The foundations of Israel's higher education system were laid in the 1920's: the Technion, a university specialising in the exact sciences, was established in Haifa in 1924, followed by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1925. After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, five new universities (Bar-Ilan, Tel-Aviv, Haifa, Ben-Gurion in Beersheba and the Weizman Institute in Rehovot) were built during the 1950's and 1960's to accommodate the needs of the newly expanded Jewish population. The Open University was founded in the 1970's. At the end of the 1970's and during the 1980's, teachers' training colleges were established, and these gradually became academic. In the 1990's an amendment to the higher education law was passed whereby technical, education and general colleges were allowed to compete with universities. Two of these colleges are destined to become fully-fledged universities in the near future. [3]

Social sciences in Israel are often identified with one of its leading scholars, Prof. S. N. EISENSTADT, professor of sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who, together with his numerous students, studied immigration and centre-periphery issues utilising macro-sociological ideas and formal research tools. These tended to be generated by the then-popular theory of modernisation. According to SHOKEID (2004), Israeli social scientists in the 1950's and 1960's apparently had little interest in documenting diverse cultures and were busy with the subject of "nation-building". Even kibbutz studies were conducted by means of formal closed interviews. Anthropology in the 1950's and 1960's was a marginal discipline, and sociology was not characterised by the use of qualitative methods in the way that we it is today. [4]

In 1963, Prof. Max GLUCKMAN, professor of anthropology at Manchester University, England, launched a research project at his university, which enabled a relatively large number of students from Israel, Canada, US and England to carry out anthropological fieldwork in Israel (SHOKEID, 2004). GLUCKMAN promoted "situational analysis" and the "extended case method" in ethnography based on participant observation. Some of his students later took up positions in Israel's university departments and established the use of qualitative methods in Israel's newer universities. Although, to this day, there is no department of anthropology at any university or college in Israel, Israeli anthropologists have succeeded in making their mark both internationally and nationally by championing the use of varied qualitative methods based upon extensive fieldwork. Gradually, with the increasing openness and diversity of Israeli society, open-ended interviews and visual and other techniques have been adopted by other social scientists. [5]

As in Switzerland (EBERLE, 2005), in Israel two camps were formed within the scientific community, at times in opposition and at times proclaiming their complementarity. Today, as EBERLE has shown with respect to Switzerland, there are few scientists who are able to practice both types of methods competently. In July 2005, SOSTEJE (the Society for the Study of Ethiopian Jewry) organised a scientific conference for students on research on Ethiopian Jews at Bar-Ilan University, one of Israel's five universities. The student representative of SOSTEJE and her committee sought a lecturer (not necessarily an expert on Ethiopian Jews), who could combine quantitative and qualitative methods and explain their uses to the students; over a two month period, they could not come up with a single suitable name (other than this author!) to give the keynote address. As I have attempted to explain in another article (WEIL, 1995), the dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative research can be arbitrary and does not serve the interests of research; approaches should be "holistic" utilising a variety of appropriate research tools. [6]

3. Academic Courses

Until recently, mandatory training in empirical methods in Israel was restricted to quantitative methods. At best, if students were interested in utilising non-statistical methods, they were referred to an anthropology class, which taught participant observation according to the classic British method. It was probably not until the 1990's that qualitative methods began to be offered as a methodological alternative to quantitative methods in universities, and later in teachers' training colleges. In most cases, a qualitative methods course was considered a "soft" option and certainly inferior to its quantitative counterpart. Such is still the case, although in recent years qualitative methods courses have become widespread and are gaining legitimacy. There is still a problem of "quality" in qualitative research: often, non-statistical approaches are assumed to be "qualitative" and are used in education, business administration, social work, and marketing with no systematic knowledge of methods. [7]

A brief survey of qualitative methods in the social sciences at Israel's universities and colleges carried out for the purposes of this article renders the following information:

- Technion: little social science per se, although urban studies and architecture are taught; no qualitative methods.
- Hebrew University: in the sociology and anthropology department, qualitative methods is compulsory at the B.A. level, as well as for M.A. In the education school, qualitative methods or ethnography of education is offered. In the psychology department there is a compulsory course in "narrative research" at the M.A. level. The Hebrew University has a compulsory course in research methods for B.A. in Communication Studies that includes quantitative and qualitative methods. For the M.A. in Communications there is a similar requirement and an optional course in advanced qualitative methods called "ethnography".

- Open University: compulsory course in research methods for B.A. in Social Sciences (including education, economics, sociology, psychology, communications, and so on) that includes quantitative and qualitative methods. There is a similar requirement for the M.A. in Education.
- Haifa University: no courses in qualitative methods in social sciences. In education, there are optional courses in qualitative methods both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. (The initiator of the qualitative research methods in the Faculty of Education wrote a review in *FQS* of the second edition of SILVERMAN's volume *Interpreting Qualitative Data* [KALEKIN-FISHMAN, 2001].)
- Tel-Aviv University: in the sociology and anthropology department, qualitative methods is compulsory at the B.A. level, as well as for the M.A. In the School of Education there is a compulsory course for the B.A. in research methodology, but a choice of either qualitative or quantitative methods.
- Bar-Ilan University: offers two compulsory parallel courses in the sociology and anthropology department in quantitative methods and qualitative methods—in life stories and ethnography only. There are also two courses in qualitative methods for the M.A. in Education (one advanced). At the M.A. level in psychology there is a compulsory course in qualitative methods, and the same is true in sociology and anthropology. [8]

The picture at Israel's colleges is similar in most cases. Most of them offer qualitative methods in education (e.g. Tel Hai college), and usually there is a course or at least an introduction to qualitative methods in social sciences in the behavioural or social science departments. For example, at the Emek Yizrael college there is a compulsory course in ethnography in the sociology and anthropology department but not in other departments; at the Yehuda and Shomron college, there is a qualitative course in the social science department. In the Netanya college there is a compulsory course in methodology, which includes surveys, evaluation and also qualitative methods. [9]

4. Other Qualitative Networks

In March 2000, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev established the Israeli Center for Qualitative Methodologies (ICQM). Its rationale was the increasing numbers of researchers and students in different disciplines who were starting to use qualitative methods and who were confronted with a myriad of methodologies and issues in their work. The ICQM sought to provide the skills needed for the scientific collection and analysis of qualitative materials. It set up a Qualitative Research Laboratory in which students and researchers could practice different techniques, and in March 2004 it organised an international conference. [10]

The goals of the centre are:

- to facilitate the development of qualitative methods in multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary contexts;
- to promote excellence in qualitative research through education, research and consultation;
- to provide a forum for collaboration among national and international experts in the field of qualitative inquiry;
- to conduct qualitative research. [11]

Although not specifically aimed at qualitative researchers, mention should be made of another organisation called IOCA (International Organisation for Cooperation in Evaluation) (also based in Beersheba) made up of organisations, *not* individuals, devoted to evaluation. IOCA is committed to cultural diversity and inclusiveness, and to bringing together different evaluation traditions, including qualitative evaluations, in ways that respect this diversity. [12]

5. Qualitative Methods Scientific Literature

Israeli scholars are well known internationally and publish work in qualitative journals. Recently, they are reaching out to experiment with new qualitative techniques, such as the Draw-A-(Religious/Secular) Boy/Girl test used by ROER-STRIER, WEIL and ADAN (2003). In the *FQS* alone, several Israeli researchers have published articles, including KALEKIN-FISHMAN (2002) and NOY (2003), to name but two. In recent years, researchers have begun to publish on qualitative methods in Hebrew in order to help students who may have had difficulty reading scientific material in English. Mention must be made of a pioneering handbook published by the Open University in Hebrew (ASHKENAZI, 1984; consultant WEIL, 1984), which is still in regular use today. Another pioneer in the field is SABAR BEN YEHOSHUA (1990), who 15 years ago published a book on qualitative methods in education in Hebrew, which has served generations of students. Recently, she edited another qualitative book (SABAR BEN YEHOSHUA, 2001). An example of a recent textbook in the field, also by a lecturer in education, is SHKEDI (2003). [13]

"Megamot" (literally: "Trends") is Israel's foremost journal in the behavioural sciences. It was founded as early as 1949, one year after the establishment of the state of Israel, and has appeared four times a year since. The journal is published in Hebrew and is of high international standard; many of Israel's top academics, who are internationally renowned, also publish there. At the same time, the journal appears to represent Israel's progress in the social sciences and young scholars publish articles on recent research in the journal. Many articles that first appear in Hebrew re-appear in different guises, or dealing with different aspects of the same research, in prestigious scientific journals in the United States and Europe. [14]

For the purposes of this article, I analysed all articles that appeared in "Megamot" during the past decade. Included in the survey were full-scale articles; review essays and academic comments were ignored. The survey revealed that of the 164 articles that appeared 1995-2005, a total of 29 (17.7%) utilised qualitative methods *per se*. Of course, some researchers carried out quantitative studies and combined these with some qualitative questions; these have not been taken into account. The survey further reveals that there has been an increase in the proportion of qualitative research published in the last five years. From 1995-1999, 71 articles were published, of which 11 (15.5%) were qualitative. From 2000-August 2005, 93 articles were published, of which 18 (19.35%) were qualitative. [15]

I shall now go on to analyse the types of articles that have appeared in "Megamot" over the past decade, paying attention to the research field, and to the theories and methods used. It is noteworthy that the most popular field of research in which qualitative methods is used is education. An article by ZOHAR, for example, examines the pedagogic knowledge of teachers in teaching cognitive skills by utilising mixed techniques, such as taping teachers' discussions, distributing self-administered questionnaires, and examining reflective analyses that the teachers made on their own class lessons (ZOHAR, 2002). DUSHNIK and SABAR BEN-YEHOSHUA document the ethical dilemmas of teachers in the 1990's by means of in-depth interviews (DUSHNIK & SABAR BEN-YEHOSHUA, 2000). Another article by YAFEH checks out psychological aspects of *haredi* (Jewish ultra-orthodox) children's literature by means of content analysis (YAFEH, 2001). LOMSKY-FEDER studied Remembrance Day rituals commemorating Jews who were killed in Israel's many wars Israel celebrated in all Israeli schools (LOMSKY-FEDER, 2003). Jewish, ethnic and "secular" rituals are another popular field to study by means of qualitative methods in Israel. [16]

6. Does National Experience Dictate Choice of Theories and Methods?

Every country is unique and Israel's national experience is clearly different from any other country. Israel is a new society, founded in 1948 and composed of Jewish immigrants from all over the world, some of whom escaped the Holocaust. It has been embroiled in prolonged conflict with its Arab neighbours. The question arises whether this would have any affect on the choice of qualitative theories, or the use of qualitative methods. As the issue of *FQS* edited by MRUCK (2000) demonstrated, there are discrepancies between countries as to familiarity with different qualitative techniques and the academic status of their use. [17]

In Israel, social and behavioural sciences are highly developed and Israeli scholars are well published in international journals. Nevertheless, the anomaly of the absence of an anthropology department at *any* university or college in Israel must be pointed out. There is no question that this unusual and almost inexplicable fact—a multi-cultural society like Israel would be a natural laboratory for anthropological research—has limited the use of qualitative research. Since anthropologists almost exclusively use qualitative methods and traditionally rely

upon participant observation as their major tool, the number of courses, students and studies in qualitative research has been truncated. According to SHOKEID (2004), in Israel one cannot claim a unique national character for anthropology, except for its concentration on distinctively Israeli field sites, usually of Jews and Arabs in Israel's pre-1967 borders, and its focus on social issues. Similarly, I would argue, one cannot claim a unique national character for the choice of methodology utilised in general in social research. [18]

A perusal of the qualitative research articles in "Megamot" in the past decade demonstrates that the *choice* of research subject matter certainly reflects Israel's national concerns. For example, qualitative studies were carried out on graduation rituals among 35 male and 15 female officers, who had served in the Israel Defense Forces for more than 20 years (RUBIN & PEER, 1999); on a "holiness class" for adolescent girls of the national-religious stream (RAPOPORT, 1999); on the attitude of settlers in the West Bank to democracy through an analysis of the paper "Nekuda" (YANOVITZKY & WEIMANN, 1998); and on encounter groups between Arab and Jewish students and a joint visit to the concentration camps in Poland (SAGY, STEINBERG & FAHERALADIN, 2002). Very few articles appear to be of global interest. [19]

Nevertheless, it cannot really be stated that the use of particular theories, e.g. grounded theory, or the use of particular methods, e.g. a heavy reliance on interviewing, can really be attributed to the national experience. A more pragmatic explanation would be that the choice of a particular theory is affected by the European or American influences on Israeli scholars, who attend international conferences and often negotiate wide global networks. [20]

7. Conclusions

This article has surveyed the evolution of qualitative methods in Israel, and has mentioned the absence of an anthropology department, which would traditionally foster qualitative methods, in any Israeli university or college. The paper documented the growth of qualitative training and the recent rise in scientific articles that utilise qualitative techniques in the past five years alone. Two surveys were carried out for this article: an examination of the courses offered at Israel's leading institutions of higher learning, and a survey of the kind of articles which appear in Israel's leading behavioural science journal. The former survey showed that qualitative training is well represented in Israel's universities and colleges, although it is not compulsory everywhere, and often regarded as the "poor relative" of qualitative research. The latter survey revealed that qualitative methods are prominent in educational research, a fuzziier field than some other social sciences, but that they are not exclusive to this field. It appears that the selection of research issues reflects Israel's national concerns, but the methods used in research appear to be arbitrary. [21]

Finally, it can be suggested that in the divided, complex, and multi-vocal society of Israel, it is crucial to develop and promote methodologies that are sensitive to difference. Qualitative research in Israel still has a long way to go if it is to gain

equal recognition with quantitative methods, to evolve multiple tools to accommodate diversities, and to analyse these diversities appropriately. [22]

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