



# Portrait of a methodology: A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to conduct a systematic literature review (SLR) of existing research which has adopted portraiture methodology to give future researchers a deeper insight about the methodology and to identify the gap in the areas for research. This study is based on a SLR of 86 articles related to studies using portraiture methodology based on the SALSA framework. The analysis of the articles using this methodology over two decades reveals the fact that it is more familiar to many social scientists and educational researchers, but remains relatively unknown within the humanities. The study provides insights into the relatively new methodology of research done in the past two decades, details the various areas which have used portraiture as a methodology and suggests further research possibilities thereby motivating and creating a need to focus research using portraiture methodology as it will be able to capture the essence of qualitative studies

**Keywords:** qualitative research, portraiture, systematic literature review

## INTRODUCTION

The study presents a complete base for understanding the methodology of portraiture as used in qualitative research designs. The objective of this SLR (systematic literature review) is to provide an exhaustive review of articles adopting portraiture methodology and to develop a classification scheme for the extant literature using the dimensions such as area of study and topic for the study, the study is also intended to identify the number of studies that were published over the years, and the most active authors in the area and the main target areas for research. The findings of this study is expected to help the researchers understand the trend of usage of portraiture methodology and what has been achieved hitherto.

"All the visible world is only light on form." Andrew Loomis. This is the prime focus of the relatively recently emerged Portraiture methodology which is an approach of qualitative research that tries to draw the essence of the complexity and dynamics of human life. The features of this methodology are "it creates a narrative that bridges the realms of science and art, merging the systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 6). The article reviews the research done in various fields using this methodology emphasising its importance in qualitative research. It is an attempt to draw the attention of researchers to the relatively new methodology which would help them in gauging the extent of research hitherto and identifying the advantages and limitations of the application of the methodology.

The paper is structured as follows. The article first elaborates on the evolution of the methodology, explains its uniqueness in relation to other methodologies and then reviews significant literature. The article ends with concluding remarks and future research directions.

## Portraiture methodology

Portraiture is a form of qualitative research developed by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). Guided by the traditions and values of the phenomenological paradigm, portraiture blends aesthetics and empiricism and shares many of the techniques, standards, and goals of ethnography. The methodology attempts to illuminate the meaning of personal stories and events in real settings presented as narrative through the 'painting' of their stories. The portraits stand as

individual chronicles revealing recognisable themes and enabling patterns of experience to emerge from each topic being studied. It helps in contextualising tacit knowledge which is otherwise not very easily unearthed in other forms of methodologies.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

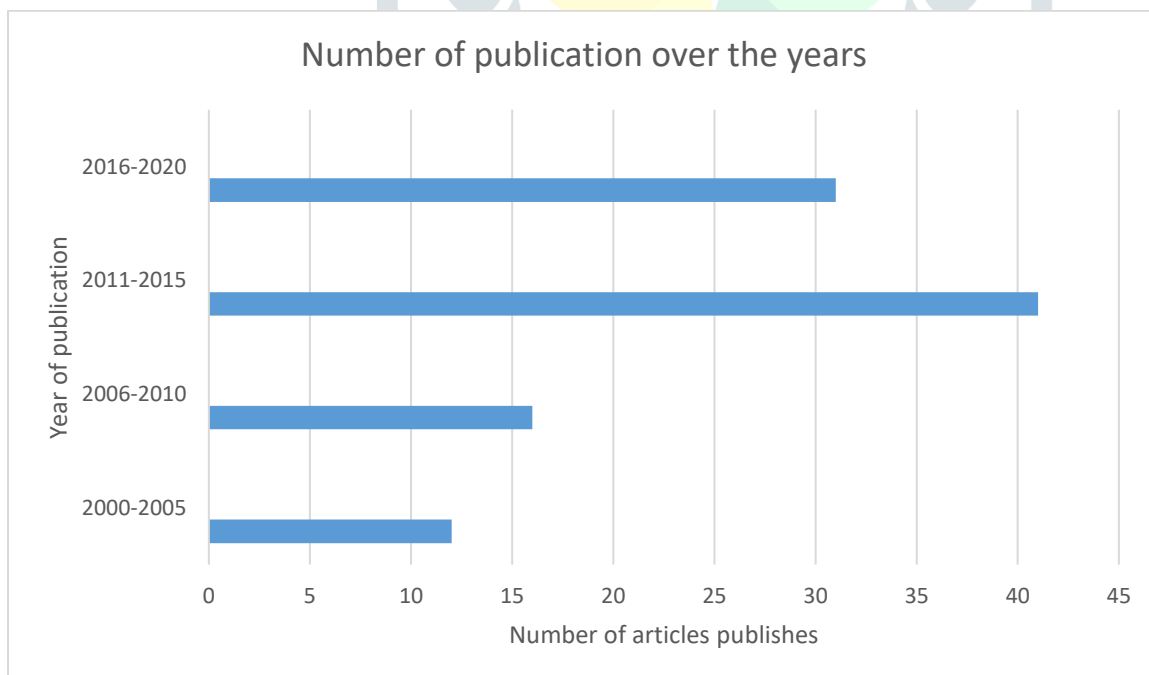
The study reviews past articles and maps typology of portraiture research in the past twenty years (2000 to 2020). In total, 99 papers related to the usage of portraiture methodology were identified. This study is based on a SLR of 86 articles using the Wildcard operator search method and the Boolean operator to perform an integrative literature search related to studies using portraiture methodology based on the SALSA framework. In order to limit the collection, articles from high quality journals were identified from only databases like google scholar, EBSCO to generate information on past research based on portraiture methodology. Articles from books white papers, and dissertations were excluded in the study due to the lack of compatibility with the objective of this article. This study presents the results of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR): “A systematic review requires locating, analysing, ordering, counting and evaluating literature from previously defined sources over a period of time” (Cárdenas-Solano, Martínez-Ardila and Becerra-Ardila, 2016, p. 932) of 86 articles. Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, and Analysis (SALSA) framework is adopted in the study for article classification.

## CLASSIFICATION OF LITERATURE

Portraiture methodology is a form of qualitative research which is relatively nascent. The articles derived for review of literature were subdivided on several bases like year and area of publication. As a result the topics that are most commonly addressed and the upcoming trends are revealed helping the researchers understand what is hitherto achieved.

The study is deductive in nature as the labels evolved during the study after a careful study of each of the articles. The various categories identified thus are country of study, the various areas of study, number of citations and the year of publication. The classification in the study may lack mutual exclusivity for one article may belong to several categories.

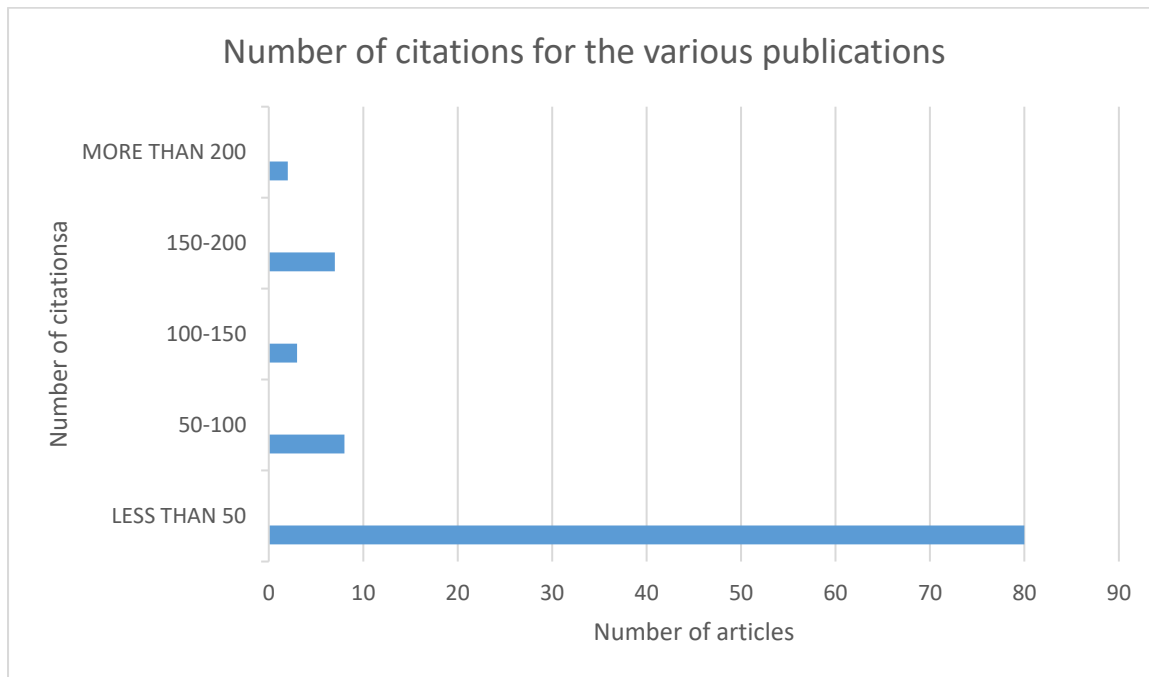
**Classification of articles based on the year of publication**



**Figure 1. Classification on the basis of the years of publication**

As we notice, there is a steady rise in the number of publications since the last decade which signifies the growing interest among researchers in the methodology and the acceptance of the same in the qualitative research.

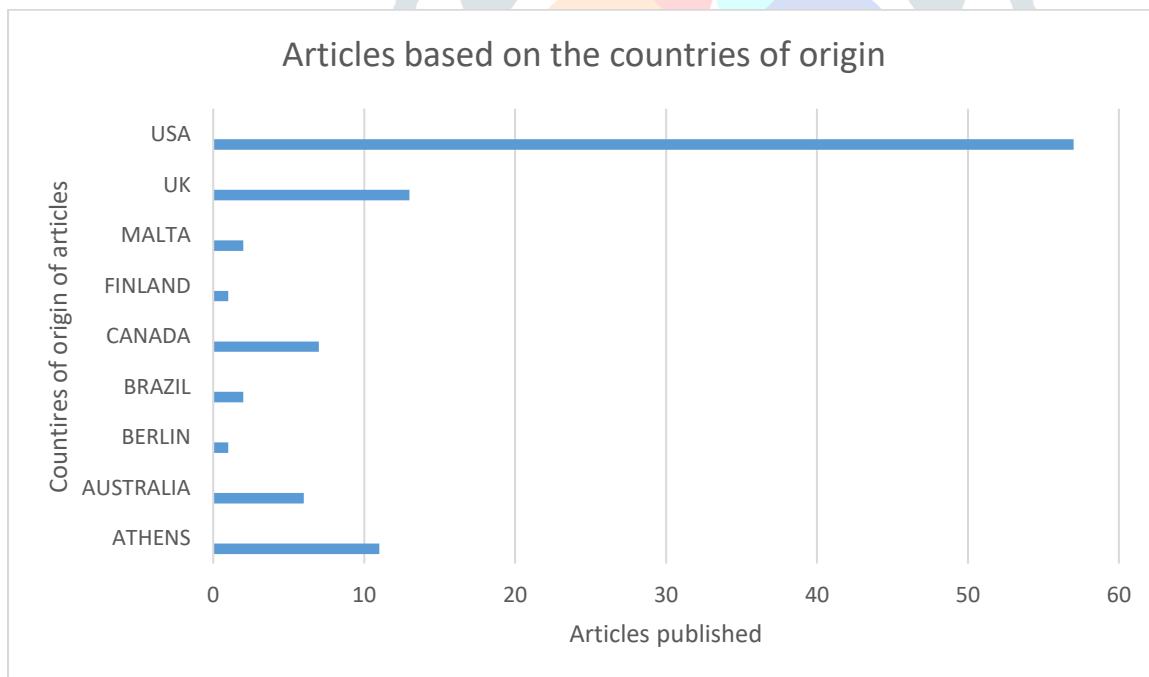
**Classification of articles on basis of number of citations**



**Figure 2. Classification on the basis if the number of citations of each article**

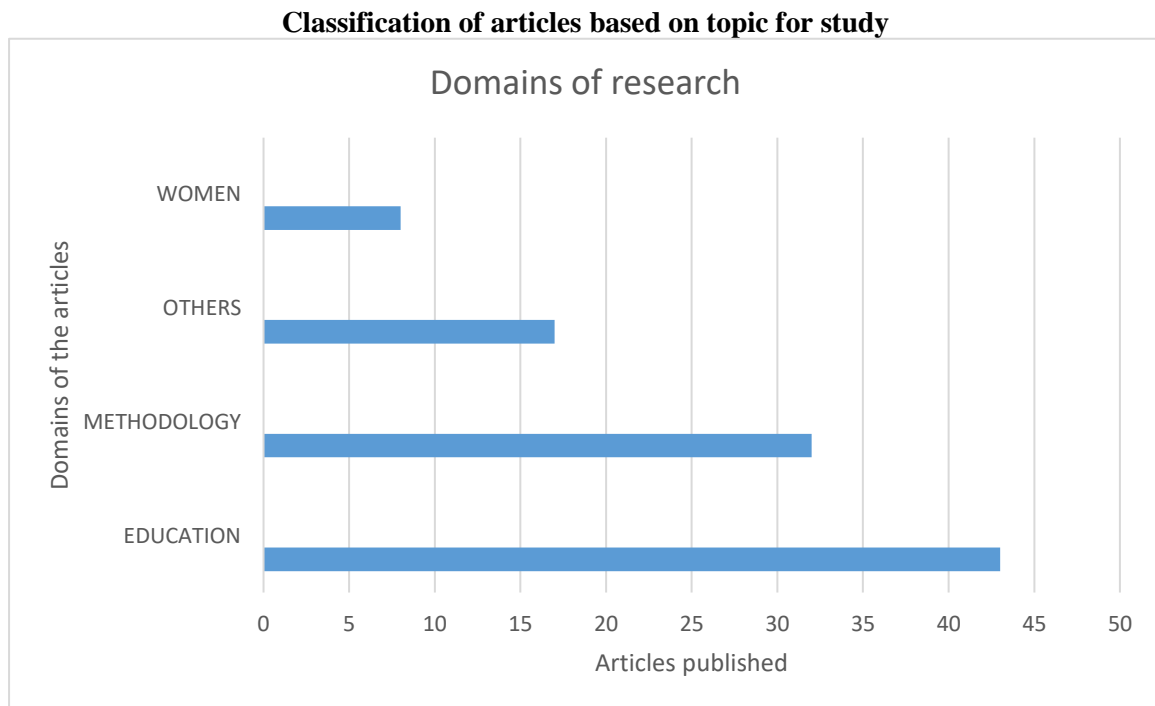
It is found in the analysis that certain seminal studies by Sara Lightfoot is the most cited article for portraiture methodology. However the study shows that the methodology is gaining credibility in terms of the number of articles generated and the number of increased citations in the recent articles.

**Classification of articles on the basis of the Country of origin**



**Figure 3. Classification based on the origin of the publication based on the country of the first author of the publication**

Geographic mapping of the articles according to the country of the first author, reveals that the largest number of studies using portraiture methodology comes from the USA, followed by the United Kingdom and Athens. The analysis shows that research from Africa and Asian continents using the portraiture methodology is almost non-existent.



**Figure 4. Classification based on the topics of research which has adopted portraiture methodology.**

The analysis shows that majority of the studies are done in the field of education especially with the sample of students and teachers. Leadership in the educational scenario has gained a lot of attention in the research using portraiture methodology. A significant number of publications are about the multidimensionality aspect of the methodology, relevance, importance, span, depth, rigour and application of portraiture as a methodology interweaving the traditional and contemporary research practices. Studies on women have also adopted this methodology. However, the other topics which has adopted this methodology are on studies about various kinds of life experiences

## FINDINGS

Summarising the findings, it is observed from the extant literature that research using portraiture methodology has significantly increased during the years in the last decade showing an overall increase of interest in the methodology. The analysis of the articles using this methodology over two decades reveals the fact that it is more familiar to many social scientists and educational researchers, but remains relatively unknown within the humanities; the article which has used portraiture methodology in the education sector has mainly studied the interaction between faculty/teachers and students/ children respectively. It is seen that the methodology has been very sparingly used by researchers in the field of management research.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the review of literature, this section offers suggestions for future research. The research was conducted with keywords such as “portraiture methodology” which has limited the number of articles. With the coming of technologies, the application of digital portraiture methodology can also be incorporated in the future studies.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to give a bird’s eye view of the research that has been conducted using portraiture methodology. Given its scope in research extensive research would take place using this methodology. Portraiture as a methodology has hardly been used by researchers in the South Asian context. Hence this article may serve as an eye opener for researchers to turn their attention towards research using this methodology.

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