Factors Influencing Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research: A Systematic Literature Review

[1] S. P. S. Senanayake, [2] Dr. N.N.J. Nawaratne, Dean

[1] Director Finance, Land Reform Commission, Sri Lanka.

[2] Faculty of Management and Technology Lincoln Postgraduate Institute Kohuwela, Sri Lanka.

ABSTRACT

Qualitative research is vital for understanding meanings, experiences, and complex social processes across disciplines, yet ensuring the rigor of qualitative findings remains a persistent challenge due to their interpretive nature. In response to the limitations of positivist criteria, trustworthiness has emerged as the primary framework for evaluating qualitative quality, although existing scholarship remains conceptually fragmented across criteria-based, process-oriented, and reporting-focused approaches. This study presents a PRISMA 2020 guided systematic literature review of 48 foundational and contemporary studies published between 1985 and 2024 to synthesize global evidence on factors influencing trustworthiness in qualitative research. The review examines conceptual foundations and identifies key philosophical, methodological, research-related, reporting, and ethical-contextual factors, integrating classical and contemporary perspectives into a coherent analytical framework. Findings demonstrate that trustworthiness is embedded throughout the qualitative research lifecycle, requiring epistemological alignment, methodological rigor, reflexivity, transparent reporting, and contextual sensitivity rather than reliance on isolated techniques or checklists. By consolidating diverse methodological debates, the review contributes an integrative framework that enhances conceptual clarity and provides practical guidance to strengthen the rigor, credibility, and applicability of qualitative research across disciplines and contexts

Keywords: Qualitative research; Trustworthiness; Credibility; Dependability; Confirmability; Transferability; Systematic literature review; PRISMA 2020; Methodological rigor; Reflexivity; Qualitative research quality; Reporting standards

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research plays a vital role in advancing knowledge across the social sciences, health sciences, education, management, and public policy by exploring meanings, experiences, and social processes. Unlike quantitative research, which emphasizes statistical validity and reliability, qualitative inquiry relies on interpretive rigor and methodological transparency to establish confidence in its findings. Consequently, the concept of trustworthiness has emerged as the dominant framework for evaluating quality in qualitative research.

The term trustworthiness was popularized by Lincoln and Guba (1985), who argued that traditional positivist criteria were inappropriate for naturalistic inquiry. Since then, a substantial global body of literature has expanded, refined, and operationalized trustworthiness through methodological strategies, verification techniques, and reporting standards. Despite this growth, researchers continue to face challenges in consistently applying and demonstrating trustworthiness, particularly in interdisciplinary and applied research contexts.

The purpose of this systematic literature review is to comprehensively synthesize worldwide scholarly evidence on factors influencing the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings. Specifically, the review aims to: (a) examine the conceptual foundations of trustworthiness, (b) identify key factors that enhance or undermine trustworthiness, and (c) integrate classical and contemporary perspectives into a coherent analytical framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evolution of Quality Assessment in Qualitative Research

The assessment of quality in qualitative research has long been a subject of methodological debate, largely due to the interpretive, contextual, and emergent nature of qualitative inquiry. Early approaches to research quality were dominated by positivist traditions, emphasizing validity, reliability, and objectivity as universal criteria. However, these standards were increasingly criticized as epistemologically incompatible with qualitative research, which prioritizes meaning, subjectivity, and context-bound knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As qualitative methodologies expanded across disciplines such as sociology, education, health sciences, management, and public policy, the need for alternative quality criteria became increasingly apparent.

In response, scholars began to conceptualize rigor in qualitative research as a function of interpretive coherence, transparency, and reflexive engagement rather than statistical generalizability. This shift marked a fundamental reorientation from outcome-based evaluation toward process-oriented assessment, laying the groundwork for the emergence of trustworthiness as the dominant evaluative framework in qualitative inquiry.

Conceptual Foundations of Trustworthiness

The concept of trustworthiness was formally introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985) within the naturalistic inquiry paradigm as an alternative to positivist quality criteria. They proposed four interrelated criteria credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to evaluate the rigor of qualitative research. Credibility refers to the plausibility and believability of findings from the perspective of participants and readers; transferability emphasizes the provision of thick description to enable contextual judgment by readers; dependability concerns the consistency and traceability of the research process; and confirmability focuses on the extent to which findings are shaped by participants' meanings rather than researcher bias.

Subsequent scholars expanded and refined this foundational framework. Guba and Lincoln (1989) further emphasized the evaluative role of negotiation, reflexivity, and stakeholder engagement, positioning trustworthiness as a dialogic and ethical process. These contributions firmly anchored trustworthiness within constructivist epistemology, emphasizing the inseparability of knowledge production, researcher positionality, and social context.

Paradigm-Sensitive and Interpretive Perspectives

As qualitative research diversified, scholars began questioning the universal application of fixed trustworthiness criteria across paradigms and methodologies. Creswell and Miller (2000) argued that validation strategies must be contingent upon the researcher's philosophical orientation, study design, and intended audience. From this perspective, trustworthiness is not a standardized checklist but a paradigm-sensitive practice that requires alignment between epistemology, methodology, and interpretation.

Similarly, Whittemore et al. (2001) conceptualized validity in qualitative research as an interpretive and ethical judgment rather than a procedural achievement. They emphasized reflexive self-critique, methodological transparency, and interpretive coherence as central to trustworthy inquiry. These perspectives highlight an ongoing methodological tension between standardization and flexibility, underscoring the need for researcher judgment and epistemological awareness in quality assessment.

Process-Oriented and Verification-Based Approaches

A significant methodological shift occurred with the introduction of process-oriented verification models that embedded trustworthiness throughout the research lifecycle. Morse et al. (2002) challenged post hoc validation practices, arguing that rigor must be actively maintained through iterative data collection, continuous analysis, and theoretical sensitivity. From this view, trustworthiness emerges through disciplined engagement with data rather than retrospective evaluation.

Empirical work by Guest et al. (2006) further operationalized this approach by introducing data saturation as an indicator of analytic adequacy. Their work provided practical guidance for methodological decision-making during data collection and analysis, particularly in applied research contexts. These contributions reframed trustworthiness as a dynamic, ongoing process, emphasizing methodological responsiveness and analytic rigor.

Reporting Standards and Transparency in Qualitative Research

Growing concerns about transparency and reproducibility have led to the development of formal reporting standards for qualitative research. The Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) proposed by Tong et al. (2007) and the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) introduced by O'Brien et al. (2014) represent efforts to improve consistency, clarity, and completeness in qualitative reporting.

While these standards enhance dependability and confirmability by promoting detailed documentation of research procedures, scholars caution against equating reporting compliance with methodological rigor (Barbour, 2001). Reporting checklists, although valuable, cannot substitute for philosophical coherence, analytic depth, or reflexive practice. This debate reflects broader concerns about the proceduralization of trustworthiness and the risk of reducing qualitative rigor to technical compliance.

Reflexivity, Researcher Positionality, and Ethics

Reflexivity has emerged as a central component of trustworthiness, highlighting the researcher's role as an active participant in knowledge construction. Scholars such as Finlay (2002) and Berger (2015) emphasize that acknowledging researcher positionality, assumptions, and power relations enhances confirmability and ethical integrity. Reflexive practice involves ongoing self-examination, transparency about decision-making, and critical engagement with the research context.

Ethical considerations are increasingly recognized as inseparable from trustworthiness. Trustworthy qualitative research requires sensitivity to participants' voices, cultural contexts, and relational dynamics (Liamputtong, 2013). International scholarship underscores that ethical norms and methodological expectations vary across cultural and institutional settings, challenging universalist assumptions embedded in early Western frameworks.

International and Contextual Perspectives on Trustworthiness

Global contributions have enriched the trustworthiness discourse by emphasizing contextual, disciplinary, and cultural specificity. Studies from Europe (Yardley, 2000; Flick, 2018), Scandinavia (Malterud, 2001), Africa (Cope, 2014), Asia (Singh, 2015; Perera & Fernando, 2018), and the Middle East (Elo et al., 2014) demonstrate that trustworthiness is shaped by local epistemologies, ethical norms, and research traditions.

These perspectives highlight the limitations of universal procedural models and reinforce the need for flexible, context-responsive applications of trustworthiness principles. Rather than competing, classical and contemporary approaches collectively suggest that high-quality qualitative research requires integration of philosophical alignment, methodological rigor, reflexive practice, transparent reporting, and ethical sensitivity.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Despite the richness of the trustworthiness literature, existing studies remain conceptually fragmented, often focusing on isolated dimensions such as criteria, processes, or reporting standards. Few studies systematically integrate these perspectives into a unified framework that spans the entire research lifecycle. Moreover, empirical evidence on how trustworthiness strategies are operationalized across disciplines and contexts remains limited.

This systematic literature review addresses these gaps by synthesizing global scholarship into a coherent analytical framework that connects philosophical foundations, methodological practices, researcher reflexivity, reporting transparency, and ethical-contextual considerations. By doing so, it advances conceptual clarity and provides practical guidance for strengthening trustworthiness in qualitative research across diverse disciplinary and applied settings.

METHODOLOGY OF THE SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Review Design and Theoretical Orientation

This review adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) design to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and replicability. A systematic approach was preferred over a narrative review to minimize selection bias and to provide a comprehensive and verifiable synthesis of global scholarship on trustworthiness in qualitative research. The review was theoretically anchored in the naturalistic and interpretivist traditions, drawing primarily on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness framework while critically engaging with post-positivist and pragmatic extensions that emphasize rigor, verification, and reporting standards.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was conducted across major international databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ERIC, and PubMed. Searches were limited to English-language publications to ensure consistency in interpretation and were focused on studies published between 1985 and 2024, capturing both foundational and contemporary contributions. Key search terms included qualitative research, trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, rigor, and verification strategies, combined using Boolean operators to form database-specific search strings.

Comparative Perspectives and Methodological Debates on Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness literature reflects a progression from foundational, criterion-based frameworks toward more process-oriented and reporting-focused approaches, revealing important methodological debates about how qualitative rigor should be conceptualized and demonstrated. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) seminal framework represents the earliest and most influential perspective, positioning credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as qualitative analogues to positivist validity and reliability within a naturalistic and constructivist paradigm. This perspective emphasizes philosophical alignment, prolonged engagement, audit trails, and reflexivity, grounding trustworthiness in epistemological coherence and contextual sensitivity. However, subsequent scholars have argued that strict or mechanical application of these criteria risks reducing trustworthiness to a procedural checklist rather than a dynamic research stance.

Responding to this concern, Creswell and Miller (2000) and Whittemore et al. (2001) advanced paradigm-contingent and interpretive perspectives, emphasizing that validation strategies must align with the researcher's epistemological position and study purpose. From this view, trustworthiness is not universal but contingent on qualitative traditions, research designs, and interpretive aims. These authors foreground researcher positionality, interpretive transparency, and ethical sensitivity, thereby shifting attention from fixed criteria toward reflexive judgment. This debate highlights a central tension in the literature between standardization and contextual flexibility.

A more decisive methodological shift is evident in the process-oriented verification approach advanced by Morse et al. (2002). Rather than treating trustworthiness as a post hoc assessment, this perspective embeds verification strategies—such as iterative data collection, theoretical sensitivity, and continuous analytic checking— throughout the research lifecycle. Empirical contributions by Guest et al. (2006) further strengthened this position by operationalizing data saturation as a marker of analytic adequacy, thereby linking methodological rigor to empirical decision-making during data collection and analysis. Together, these studies challenge criterion-based models by arguing that trustworthiness emerges through disciplined research practice rather than retrospective validation.

More recent scholarship reflects growing concern with transparency, reproducibility, and reporting quality, particularly in applied and interdisciplinary fields. Reporting standards such as COREQ (Tong et al., 2007) and SRQR (O'Brien et al., 2014) represent a pragmatic response to inconsistencies in qualitative reporting by codifying expectations for documentation, researcher disclosure, and analytic clarity. While these standards enhance confirmability and dependability, critics caution that reporting compliance alone cannot substitute for

philosophical coherence or analytic depth. This has led to an important debate about whether trustworthiness resides primarily in research conduct, documentation, or interpretation.

International contributions further enrich this discourse by emphasizing contextual, ethical, and disciplinary specificity. Yardley (2000) and Shenton (2004) propose flexible principles and practical strategies that bridge philosophical rigor and applied research realities, while Nowell et al. (2017) demonstrate how trustworthiness criteria can be operationalized within thematic analysis through structured coding, team reflexivity, and auditability. Studies from Norway (Malterud, 2001), South Africa (Cope, 2014), Iran (Elo et al., 2014), India (Singh, 2015), and Sri Lanka (Perera & Fernando, 2018) underscore that trustworthiness is deeply shaped by socio-cultural context, ethical norms, and researcher positionality, challenging assumptions of methodological universality embedded in early Western frameworks.

Inclusion, Exclusion, and Screening Process of Related Articles

Importantly, this systematic review strengthens transparency by employing a PRISMA 2020–aligned screening process, which identified 1,246 records, removed 312 duplicates, screened 934 titles and abstracts, assessed 192 full-text articles, and retained 48 studies for final synthesis. The numerical clarity of this process reinforces dependability and confirmability at the review level, aligning methodological practice with the very trustworthiness principles under examination.

Overall, the comparative synthesis reveals that trustworthiness has evolved from a foundational, criterion-based construct to a multi-layered methodological orientation encompassing philosophical alignment, processual rigor, reflexive practice, and transparent reporting. Rather than competing, these perspectives are best understood as complementary, with high-quality qualitative research requiring deliberate integration of criteria, process, context, and documentation across the entire research lifecycle.

Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process
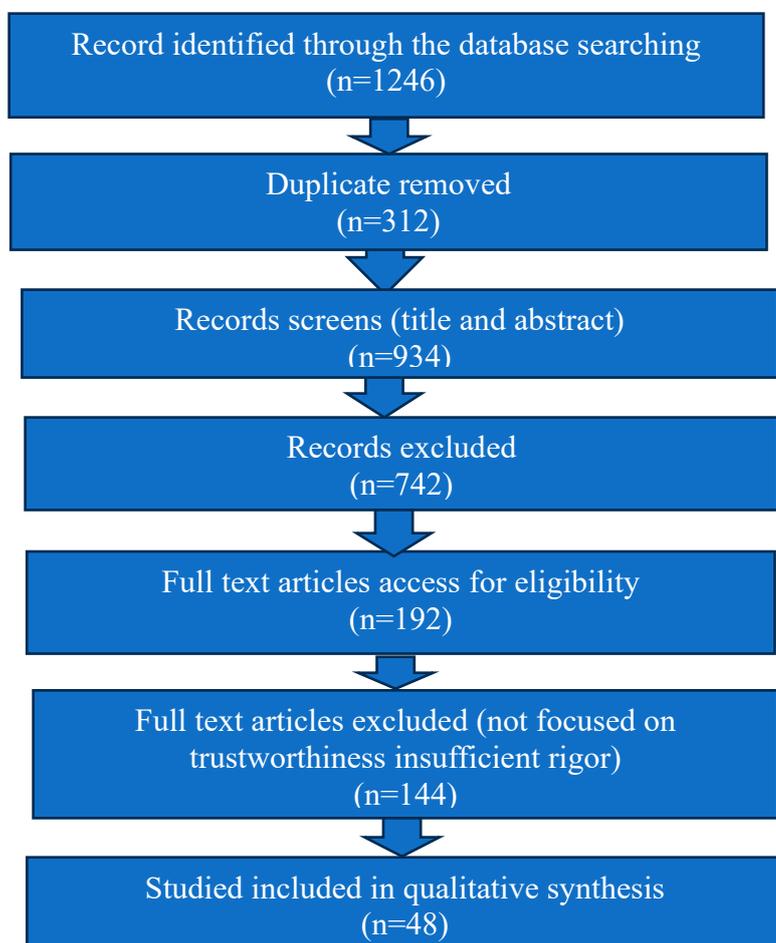
Source – PRISMA 2020

Figure 1 presents the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram illustrating the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies in the systematic literature review on factors influencing trustworthiness in qualitative research. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram illustrating the systematic study selection process employed in this review. The diagram outlines four sequential stages identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion detailing how records were sourced from multiple international databases, duplicates were removed, and studies were progressively screened based on titles, abstracts, and full-text assessments. It transparently reports the number of records excluded at each stage and the reasons for exclusion, culminating in the final set of studies included in the qualitative synthesis. By visually documenting this process, Figure 1 enhances the transparency, reproducibility, and methodological rigor of the systematic literature review in accordance with PRISMA 2020 reporting standards.

Data Extraction, Analysis, and Quality Assurance

Data were systematically extracted from each included study, capturing author(s), year, country or region, disciplinary context, methodological focus, and trustworthiness-related contributions. An inductive thematic synthesis approach was employed, involving iterative coding, constant comparison, and abstraction into higher-order themes. Analytical rigor was enhanced through reflexive memoing, peer debriefing, and maintenance of an audit trail, thereby strengthening dependability and confirmability.

Dimensions of Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is commonly conceptualized through four interrelated dimensions **credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability** originally articulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These dimensions provide an evaluative framework that reflects the epistemological foundations of qualitative inquiry while accommodating its interpretive and context-bound nature. Rather than functioning as discrete criteria, the dimensions of trustworthiness operate synergistically across the research lifecycle, shaping research design, data generation, analysis, interpretation, and reporting.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which qualitative findings are perceived as believable, accurate, and meaningful representations of participants' experiences and social realities. It is concerned with the internal coherence of interpretations and their resonance with both participants and informed readers. Strategies commonly associated with enhancing credibility include prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation of data sources or methods, member checking, and thick, rich description. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that credibility is not merely achieved through technique but through epistemological alignment between research questions, methodological choices, and interpretive claims. Credibility thus reflects interpretive rigor, contextual sensitivity, and analytic depth rather than procedural compliance alone.

Transferability

Transferability addresses the extent to which qualitative findings may be applicable or informative beyond the specific research context in which they were generated. Unlike statistical generalization, transferability relies on analytic generalization and reader judgment. The responsibility of the qualitative researcher is not to claim universal applicability but to provide sufficiently detailed contextual information such as participant characteristics, settings, and social conditions to allow readers to assess the relevance of findings to other contexts. Thick description, transparent contextualization, and reflexive interpretation are central to enabling transferability. This dimension underscores the importance of contextual awareness and challenges universalist assumptions in qualitative research evaluation.

Dependability

Dependability concerns stability, consistency, and logical traceability of the qualitative research process over time. It reflects the extent to which research procedures are systematic, well documented, and responsive to the evolving nature of qualitative inquiry. Strategies such as audit trails, reflexive journals, methodological memos,

and stepwise documentation of analytic decisions enhance dependability by allowing others to follow the research process and assess its coherence. Importantly, dependability does not imply methodological rigidity; rather, it acknowledges the emergent nature of qualitative research while emphasizing transparency in how methodological adaptations are made and justified.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which qualitative findings are shaped by participants' meanings and empirical evidence rather than by researcher bias, assumptions, or preferences. It emphasizes reflexivity, transparency, and analytic accountability. Confirmability is strengthened through explicit acknowledgment of researcher positionality, reflexive engagement with assumptions, triangulation, and the maintenance of audit trails linking data to interpretations. Contemporary perspectives view confirmability not as researcher neutrality but as disciplined reflexive practice, recognizing the researcher as an active co-constructor of knowledge while ensuring that interpretations remain grounded in the data.

Integrative and Contemporary Perspectives

Recent methodological scholarship highlights that trustworthiness dimensions should not be treated as isolated checklists, but as **integrated and process-oriented principles** embedded throughout the research lifecycle. Process-based approaches emphasize continuous verification, iterative analysis, and methodological responsiveness, while reporting standards such as COREQ and SRQR contribute to transparency and documentation. Ethical sensitivity, researcher reflexivity, and contextual awareness increasingly cut across all four dimensions, reinforcing the view that trustworthiness is both a methodological and moral commitment.

In sum, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability collectively provide a robust framework for evaluating and enhancing the quality of qualitative research. When applied reflexively and contextually, these dimensions support methodological rigor, interpretive integrity, and ethical responsibility, thereby strengthening the credibility and utility of qualitative research findings across diverse disciplines and applied settings.

Table 1, Global Systematic Literature Review: Comparative Trustworthiness Studies (n = 48)

S/N	Country / Region	Author(s) & Year	Focus / Key Contribution to Trustworthiness	Core Trustworthiness Dimensions
1	United States	Lincoln & Guba (1985)	Foundational framework introducing four trustworthiness criteria	Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, Confirmability
2	United States	Guba & Lincoln (1989)	Evaluation in naturalistic inquiry	All four
3	United States	Creswell & Miller (2000)	Validation strategies linked to qualitative paradigms	Credibility, Confirmability
4	United States	Whittemore et al. (2001)	Conceptualization of validity in qualitative research	Credibility, Confirmability
5	United States	Morse et al. (2002)	Verification strategies embedded in research process	Credibility, Dependability

S/N	Country / Region	Author(s) & Year	Focus / Key Contribution to Trustworthiness	Core Trustworthiness Dimensions
6	United States	Guest et al. (2006)	Empirical operationalization of data saturation	Credibility, Dependability
7	United States	Patton (2002)	Triangulation and qualitative rigor	Credibility, Confirmability
8	United States	Maxwell (2012)	Validity as understanding, not procedure	Credibility
9	United States	O'Brien et al. (2014)	SRQR reporting standards	Credibility, Confirmability
10	United States	Tracy (2010)	Eight "big-tent" criteria for qualitative quality	All four
11	United Kingdom	Yardley (2000)	Principles for assessing qualitative research quality	Credibility, Transferability
12	United Kingdom	Yardley (2008)	Demonstrating validity in qualitative psychology	Credibility
13	United Kingdom	Shenton (2004)	Practical strategies for trustworthiness	All four
14	United Kingdom	Silverman (2013)	Analytic rigor and transparency	Dependability, Confirmability
15	United Kingdom	Braun & Clarke (2006)	Thematic analysis rigor	Credibility, Dependability
16	Canada	Nowell et al. (2017)	Trustworthiness in thematic analysis	All four
17	Canada	Sandelowski (1993)	Rigor vs relevance debate	Credibility
18	Canada	Thorne (2016)	Interpretive description rigor	Credibility, Confirmability
19	Australia	Tong et al. (2007)	COREQ reporting checklist	Credibility, Dependability
20	Australia	Liamputtong (2013)	Ethical rigor in qualitative research	Credibility, Confirmability
21	Australia	Braun & Clarke (2021)	Reflexive thematic analysis	Credibility
22	Norway	Malterud (2001)	Systematic text condensation	Credibility, Dependability

S/N	Country / Region	Author(s) & Year	Focus / Key Contribution to Trustworthiness	Core Trustworthiness Dimensions
23	Norway	Malterud et al. (2016)	Information power vs saturation	Credibility
24	South Africa	Cope (2014)	Trustworthiness in qualitative nursing research	All four
25	South Africa	De Vos et al. (2011)	Applied qualitative rigor	Credibility, Dependability
26	Iran	Elo et al. (2014)	Trustworthiness in content analysis	Dependability, Confirmability
27	Iran	Graneheim & Lundman (2004)	Content analysis credibility	Credibility, Dependability
28	India	Singh (2015)	Contextual and ethical rigor	Credibility, Confirmability
29	India	Chandra & Shang (2019)	Reflexivity in qualitative inquiry	Confirmability
30	Sri Lanka	Perera & Fernando (2018)	Contextual reflexivity in social research	Credibility, Transferability
31	Asia (Regional)	Hennink et al. (2011)	Methodological transparency	Credibility
32	Europe	Flick (2018)	Quality in qualitative research design	All four
33	Europe	Seale (1999)	Quality strategies in qualitative inquiry	Dependability
34	Global	Finlay (2002)	Reflexivity and trustworthiness	Confirmability
35	Global	Berger (2015)	Researcher positionality	Confirmability
36	Global	Mays & Pope (2000)	Rigor in qualitative health research	Credibility
37	Global	Barbour (2001)	Checklist critique	Dependability
38	Global	Lincoln et al. (2011)	Paradigm debates in qualitative research	All four
39	Global	Creswell & Poth (2018)	Qualitative inquiry design coherence	Credibility
40	Global	Denzin (2017)	Interpretive validity	Credibility

S/N	Country / Region	Author(s) & Year	Focus / Key Contribution to Trustworthiness	Core Trustworthiness Dimensions
41	Global	Kvale (1995)	Validation as craftsmanship	Credibility
42	Global	Koch (2006)	Establishing rigor	Dependability
43	Global	Tobin & Begley (2004)	Trustworthiness criteria application	All four
44	Global	Noble & Smith (2015)	Bias and rigor in qualitative research	Confirmability
45	Global	Korstjens & Moser (2018)	Practical guidance for trustworthiness	All four
46	Global	Anney (2014)	Ensuring trustworthiness	All four
47	Global	Rolfe (2006)	Validity reconceptualization	Credibility
48	Global	O'Cathain (2019)	Transparency and methodological integrity	Dependability, Confirmability

Source – Literature Reviewed Articles

Table 1 Summarized the final qualitative synthesis included 48 peer-reviewed methodological and conceptual studies that collectively represent foundational, process-oriented, reporting-based, and context-sensitive perspectives on trustworthiness in qualitative research. Also, Table 1 summarizes the global body of literature included in the systematic review, comprising 48 seminal and contemporary studies that collectively shape scholarly understanding of trustworthiness in qualitative research. The table demonstrates the geographical breadth of contributions, with influential works originating from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Europe, Asia, and other global contexts, reflecting the widespread methodological relevance of trustworthiness across disciplines. Foundational studies, such as those by Lincoln and Guba, are presented alongside later methodological refinements, reporting standards, and critical debates that extend and challenge early frameworks. Collectively, the studies address all four core dimensions of trustworthiness credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability while also highlighting evolving emphases on reflexivity, transparency, ethical rigor, and analytical coherence. By synthesizing these diverse perspectives, Table 1 provides a structured overview of how trustworthiness has been conceptualized, operationalized, and advanced in qualitative research over time.

Factors Influencing Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

Drawing on the systematic synthesis of 48 foundational and contemporary studies, this review identifies a set of interrelated factors that influence the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings. Consistent with naturalistic and interpretivist traditions, these factors extend beyond isolated techniques to encompass philosophical positioning, methodological coherence, analytic rigor, researcher reflexivity, reporting transparency, and ethical contextual sensitivity. Together, they demonstrate that trustworthiness is not achieved through post hoc validation but is constructed continuously across the research lifecycle.

Philosophical and Research Design Alignment

Philosophical alignment between epistemological assumptions, research questions, and methodological choices emerges as a foundational determinant of trustworthiness. Studies consistently emphasize that qualitative rigor is compromised when methods are applied without coherence to underlying paradigms. Naturalistic,

interpretivist, constructivist, and pragmatic orientations require different validation logics, and trustworthiness must therefore be evaluated relative to paradigm-specific assumptions. Conceptual clarity at the design stage supports credibility by ensuring that data generation and interpretation are theoretically grounded, while also enhancing dependability through coherent methodological decision-making. Misalignment between philosophy and design is repeatedly identified as a source of weakened interpretive integrity.

Data Collection Factors

Trustworthiness is strongly influenced by the rigor and transparency of data collection processes. Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, purposeful sampling, and sensitivity to context are widely recognized as essential strategies for enhancing credibility. Empirical work further highlights the importance of sampling adequacy, information power, and data saturation as indicators of analytic sufficiency rather than numerical completeness. Flexibility and responsiveness during data generation allowing methods to evolve in response to emerging insights are also central to maintaining methodological integrity. Poorly justified sampling decisions or superficial engagement with participants are shown to undermine both credibility and transferability.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Factors

Analytic rigor represents a critical determinant of trustworthiness, particularly in relation to credibility and dependability. The reviewed literature underscores the importance of systematic, transparent, and iterative analytic procedures, including coding consistency, constant comparison, and theoretical sensitivity. Trustworthy interpretation requires explicit linkage between data, analytic decisions, and conclusions, supported by audit trails and reflexive analytic memos. Process-oriented perspectives emphasize continuous verification throughout analysis rather than retrospective validation. Where analytic procedures are opaque or insufficiently documented, confirmability and dependability are significantly weakened.

Researcher-Related Factors and Reflexivity

The role of the researcher is central to trustworthiness, given the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry. Reflexivity defined as critical self-awareness of positionality, assumptions, and influence on the research process emerges as a cross-cutting factor affecting all dimensions of trustworthiness. Studies consistently demonstrate that transparent acknowledgment of researcher roles, power relations, and insider outsider dynamics enhances confirmability and ethical integrity. Rather than striving for neutrality, trustworthy qualitative research requires disciplined reflexive engagement that makes the researcher's interpretive role visible and analytically accountable.

Reporting and Documentation Practices

Transparent and comprehensive reporting is essential for enabling readers, reviewers, and policymakers to assess the trustworthiness of qualitative findings. Reporting standards such as COREQ and SRQR contribute to dependability and confirmability by formalizing expectations for methodological disclosure, analytic transparency, and researcher reflexivity. However, the literature cautions against treating reporting checklists as substitutes for methodological rigor. Effective reporting must be grounded in substantive analytic depth and philosophical coherence, ensuring that documentation reflects genuine research quality rather than procedural compliance.

Ethical and Contextual Factors

Ethical sensitivity and contextual awareness are increasingly recognized as integral to trustworthiness rather than peripheral considerations. Respect for participants, cultural responsiveness, informed consent, and relational ethics directly influence credibility and confirmability. International studies emphasize that trustworthiness is shaped by socio-cultural norms, institutional settings, and disciplinary traditions, challenging universalist approaches to qualitative evaluation. Ethical reflexivity and contextual grounding are therefore essential for ensuring that qualitative findings are both trustworthy and socially meaningful.

Integration of Trustworthiness Factors Across the Research Lifecycle

A key insight from the systematic review is that trustworthiness emerges through the interaction of multiple factors rather than through isolated strategies. Philosophical alignment informs design decisions; data collection and analysis are shaped by reflexivity and ethical awareness; and transparent reporting enables confirmability and transferability. High-quality qualitative research integrates these factors holistically across all stages of inquiry. Fragmented or checklist-driven approaches risk undermining the very rigor they seek to demonstrate.

In summary, trustworthiness is best understood as a dynamic, multidimensional methodological orientation rather than a fixed set of evaluative criteria. By synthesizing philosophical, methodological, analytical, researcher-related, reporting, and contextual factors, this review provides a comprehensive framework for strengthening the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of qualitative research across disciplines and applied contexts.

Table 2. Philosophical, Methodological, and Contextual Dimensions of Trustworthiness

Country / Region	Author(s) & Year	Philosophical & Research Design Alignment	Data Collection Factors	Data Analysis & Interpretation Factors	Researcher-Related Factors	Reporting & Documentation Factors	Ethical & Contextual Factors
United States	Lincoln & Guba (1985)	Naturalistic inquiry; constructivist paradigm	Prolonged engagement; persistent observation	Audit trails; data–finding linkage	Reflexivity; neutrality	Transparent methodological documentation	Respect for context and participant meanings
United States	Guba & Lincoln (1989)	Fourth-generation evaluation; constructivism	Dialogic data generation	Negotiated interpretations	Researcher–stakeholder engagement	Reflexive evaluation records	Democratic and contextual ethics
United States	Creswell & Miller (2000)	Validation strategies aligned with paradigms	Triangulation; member checking	Interpretive validation	Researcher positionality awareness	Explicit validation procedures	Ethical sensitivity to participants
United States	Whittemore et al. (2001)	Conceptual clarity of design	Flexible and systematic data gathering	Logical and coherent interpretation	Reflexive self-critique	Clear analytic decision trails	Ethical integrity in inquiry
United States	Morse et al. (2002)	Responsive, emergent qualitative design	Iterative, concurrent data collection	Continuous verification strategies	Theoretical sensitivity	Ongoing methodological records	Ethical responsibility across phases
United States	Patton (2002)	Pragmatic qualitative evaluation	Method triangulation	Pattern and theme convergence	Reflexive evaluator stance	Transparent analytic rationale	Contextual utilization ethics

Country / Region	Author(s) & Year	Philosophical & Research Design Alignment	Data Collection Factors	Data Analysis & Interpretation Factors	Researcher-Related Factors	Reporting & Documentation Factors	Ethical & Contextual Factors
United States	Guest et al. (2006)	Sampling logic in qualitative design	Adequate sampling; saturation	Thematic consistency and stability	Analytical discipline	Explicit reporting of saturation	Respect for participant voice
United States	Maxwell (2012)	Validity as understanding	Purposeful data generation	Explanatory coherence	Researcher reflexivity	Explicit validity discussion	Context-sensitive interpretation
United States	O'Brien et al. (2014)	Methodological coherence across stages	Clearly described methods	Transparent analytic procedures	Disclosure of researcher roles	SRQR standardized reporting	Ethical transparency
United States	Tracy (2010)	Big-tent qualitative quality framework	Rich, sincere data practices	Meaningful coherence	Researcher sincerity	Clear, engaging reporting	Moral and relational ethics
United Kingdom	Yardley (2000)	Sensitivity to context and theory	Contextually appropriate methods	Rigorous and reflective interpretation	Reflexive engagement	Clarity and transparency	Cultural and social sensitivity
United Kingdom	Yardley (2008)	Validity as process and practice	Flexible data strategies	Interpretive rigor	Reflexive accountability	Explicit quality claims	Ethical responsiveness
United Kingdom	Shenton (2004)	Fit between research questions and design	Clear data boundaries	Stepwise replication; audit trail	Reflexive awareness	Detailed methodological description	Ethical credibility
United Kingdom	Silverman (2013)	Interactionist qualitative rigor	Naturally occurring data	Analytic transparency	Analytical skepticism	Explicit analytic logic	Ethical realism
United Kingdom	Braun & Clarke (2006)	Thematic analysis epistemic clarity	Systematic coding	Theme development transparency	Reflexive interpretation	Clear analytic stages	Contextual meaning making

Country / Region	Author(s) & Year	Philosophical & Research Design Alignment	Data Collection Factors	Data Analysis & Interpretation Factors	Researcher-Related Factors	Reporting & Documentation Factors	Ethical & Contextual Factors
Canada	Nowell et al. (2017)	Alignment with thematic analysis	Transparent data handling	Structured coding and themes	Reflexive team analysis	Comprehensive analytic documentation	Ethical data handling
Canada	Sandelowski (1993)	Rigor vs relevance debate	Pragmatic data practices	Interpretive plausibility	Researcher judgment	Justified methodological choices	Contextual relevance
Canada	Thorne (2016)	Interpretive description	Practice-oriented data collection	Applied analytic logic	Clinical reflexivity	Clear methodological rationale	Ethical applicability
Australia	Tong et al. (2007)	Interview-based qualitative design	Rigorous interview procedures	Consistent coding	Researcher transparency	COREQ checklist reporting	Ethical interview conduct
Australia	Liamputtong (2013)	Cross-cultural qualitative design	Culturally sensitive methods	Contextual interpretation	Ethical reflexivity	Transparent documentation	Cultural respect
Australia	Braun & Clarke (2021)	Reflexive thematic analysis	Flexible data engagement	Reflexive meaning making	Researcher subjectivity acknowledged	Explicit epistemological positioning	Contextual ethics
Norway	Malterud (2001)	Methodological consistency	Purposeful data generation	Systematic text condensation	Reflexive interpretation	Explicit analytic steps	Ethical sensitivity
Norway	Malterud et al. (2016)	Information power framework	Sample adequacy logic	Conceptual depth	Reflexive judgment	Transparent sampling rationale	Contextual appropriateness
South Africa	Cope (2014)	Nursing qualitative rigor	Context-sensitive collection	Trustworthy interpretation	Reflexive clinical insight	Clear methodological reporting	Ethical accountability
South Africa	De Vos et al. (2011)	Applied qualitative coherence	Structured fieldwork	Analytical consistency	Reflexive practice	Methodological transparency	Social responsibility

Country / Region	Author(s) & Year	Philosophical & Research Design Alignment	Data Collection Factors	Data Analysis & Interpretation Factors	Researcher-Related Factors	Reporting & Documentation Factors	Ethical & Contextual Factors
Iran	Elo et al. (2014)	Structured content analysis	Transparent coding procedures	Logical category development	Analytical neutrality	Detailed reporting standards	Ethical rigor
Iran	Graneheim & Lundman (2004)	Interpretive content analysis	Meaning unit extraction	Credible abstraction	Reflexive interpretation	Explicit analytic description	Contextual sensitivity
India	Singh (2015)	Contextually grounded design	Culturally appropriate methods	Context-sensitive interpretation	Ethical reflexivity	Transparent documentation	Cultural responsibility
India	Chandra & Shang (2019)	Reflexive qualitative inquiry	Narrative data engagement	Interpretive depth	Positional reflexivity	Clear reflexive accounts	Contextual ethics
Sri Lanka	Perera & Fernando (2018)	Contextually aligned frameworks	Locally grounded data collection	Reflexive interpretation	Researcher positionality	Contextual reporting	Socio-cultural sensitivity
Global	Finlay (2002)	Reflexive qualitative epistemology	Dialogic data practices	Reflexive interpretation	Researcher self-awareness	Transparent reflexive accounts	Ethical relationality
Global	Berger (2015)	Positionality-aware design	Insider/outsider data access	Interpretive reflexivity	Identity awareness	Explicit positionality statements	Ethical boundary management
Global	Mays & Pope (2000)	Health qualitative rigor	Systematic data collection	Plausible interpretation	Reflexive accountability	Transparent quality criteria	Ethical clinical context
Global	Barbour (2001)	Critique of checklists	Purposeful methodological choice	Analytic justification	Researcher judgment	Explicit methodological defense	Contextual reasoning
Global	Lincoln et al. (2011)	Paradigm pluralism	Methodological openness	Interpretive legitimacy	Reflexive paradigm stance	Explicit paradigm articulation	Ethical epistemology

Country / Region	Author(s) & Year	Philosophical & Research Design Alignment	Data Collection Factors	Data Analysis & Interpretation Factors	Researcher-Related Factors	Reporting & Documentation Factors	Ethical & Contextual Factors
Global	Creswell & Poth (2018)	Coherent qualitative designs	Methodologically aligned collection	Integrative interpretation	Reflexive researcher stance	Clear design logic	Ethical sensitivity
Global	Denzin (2017)	Interpretive qualitative inquiry	Narrative and performance data	Critical interpretation	Moral reflexivity	Transparent interpretive claims	Social justice ethics
Global	Kvale (1995)	Validation as craftsmanship	Dialogical interviews	Interpretive validation	Skilled researcher role	Transparent validation logic	Ethical interviewing
Global	Koch (2006)	Establishing rigor	Consistent data practices	Interpretive accountability	Reflexive awareness	Clear rigor strategies	Ethical reflexivity
Global	Tobin & Begley (2004)	Applied trustworthiness criteria	Methodical data engagement	Transparent interpretation	Reflexive practice	Explicit criteria application	Ethical credibility
Global	Noble & Smith (2015)	Bias-aware qualitative design	Reflexive data collection	Transparent interpretation	Bias awareness	Clear audit trail	Ethical integrity
Global	Korstjens & Moser (2018)	Practical trustworthiness guidance	Systematic field procedures	Credible analytic logic	Reflexive researcher role	Transparent documentation	Ethical sensitivity
Global	Anney (2014)	Trustworthiness operationalization	Triangulated methods	Confirmable interpretation	Reflexivity	Explicit rigor strategies	Contextual ethics
Global	Rolfe (2006)	Reconceptualizing validity	Practice-based data	Interpretive plausibility	Researcher expertise	Argument-based reporting	Contextual judgment
Global	O'Cathain (2019)	Methodological integrity	Integrated data practices	Transparent synthesis	Reflexive integration	Explicit methodological logic	Ethical coherence

Source – Literature Reviewed Articles

Table 2 provides a detailed comparative synthesis of the philosophical, methodological, researcher-related, reporting, and ethical dimensions through which trustworthiness is operationalized in qualitative research across diverse global contexts. The table demonstrates that trustworthiness is consistently grounded in strong philosophical and research design alignment most commonly within constructivist, interpretivist, and pragmatic paradigms while being reinforced through rigorous and context-sensitive data collection strategies such as prolonged engagement, triangulation, and culturally appropriate methods. Across studies, systematic and transparent data analysis practices, including audit trails, verification strategies, and reflexive interpretation, emerge as central to dependability and confirmability. The table also highlights the critical role of researcher reflexivity, positionality awareness, and ethical accountability in shaping credible and trustworthy findings. Collectively, the evidence in Table 2 underscores that trustworthiness is not a single methodological act but a multidimensional, process-oriented achievement embedded throughout the qualitative research lifecycle and responsive to contextual and ethical considerations.

DISCUSSION

Critical Perspectives and Methodological Debates

The synthesis reveals enduring methodological debates within the trustworthiness literature. While Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework remains foundational, some scholars argue that strict adherence to its four criteria risks proceduralism if applied mechanically. In contrast, Morse et al. (2002) emphasize verification strategies embedded throughout the research process rather than post hoc validation, highlighting a process-oriented view of rigor. Similarly, Creswell and Miller (2000) link validation strategies to underlying paradigms, suggesting that trustworthiness cannot be separated from epistemological positioning. These debates underscore a shift from checklist-driven approaches toward reflexive, context-sensitive applications of trustworthiness.

Integrating Reporting Standards and Analytical Rigor

Contemporary contributions, such as SRQR and COREQ, reflect growing concern for transparency and reproducibility, particularly in applied fields such as health sciences and education. However, critics caution that reporting standards should support, rather than substitute for, methodological rigor. The reviewed literature collectively suggests that trustworthiness is maximized when philosophical alignment, analytical depth, and transparent reporting are treated as interdependent rather than discrete elements.

Practical Application of the Proposed Framework

To illustrate real-world applicability, the integrated framework can be applied, for example, in qualitative health research by combining prolonged engagement and triangulation (credibility) with detailed contextual descriptions of clinical settings (transferability) and audit trails documenting analytic decisions (dependability). Similarly, in policy-oriented qualitative studies, reflexive disclosure of researcher positionality and transparent reporting aligned with SRQR can enhance confirmability and stakeholder confidence. These examples demonstrate how trustworthiness principles translate into practical research decisions across contexts.

Implications for Research and Practice

The findings offer clear implications for qualitative researchers, supervisors, and journal reviewers. Researchers are encouraged to embed trustworthiness strategies throughout the research lifecycle rather than treating them as reporting requirements. Supervisors and reviewers may use the synthesized framework as an evaluative lens to assess qualitative rigor across disciplines. For practitioners and policymakers, the framework enhances confidence in qualitative evidence by clarifying how methodological transparency and reflexivity underpin credible findings.

Application of the Trustworthiness Framework: Practical Examples

To demonstrate the real-world applicability of the proposed trustworthiness framework, this section illustrates its use through the practical qualitative research contexts specially in healthcare services in public hospital setting

evaluation, community response to public sector policy reform and qualitative governance and public sector accountability research . These examples show how philosophical alignment, methodological rigor, researcher reflexivity, and transparent reporting interact to strengthen qualitative trustworthiness in applied settings.

Example 1: Qualitative Health Services Research in a Public Hospital Setting

In a qualitative study exploring patient experiences of outpatient care in a public hospital, the trustworthiness framework can guide methodological decisions from design to reporting. Philosophical alignment is established by adopting an interpretivist paradigm that recognizes patients' experiences as socially constructed and context dependent. Credibility is enhanced through purposive sampling of patients with diverse clinical backgrounds, prolonged engagement in the field, and triangulation of in-depth interviews with observational field notes. During data analysis, dependability is ensured through systematic coding, peer debriefing among the research team, and maintenance of a detailed audit trail documenting analytic decisions. Confirmability is strengthened by reflexive journaling that makes researchers' clinical assumptions explicit and by linking interpretations directly to verbatim patient quotations. Transferability is supported through thick description of the hospital context, service processes, and patient demographics, allowing readers to assess applicability to similar healthcare settings. Reporting aligned with COREQ further enhances transparency, enabling practitioners and policymakers to confidently use the findings to inform service improvements.

Example 2: Qualitative Policy Research on Community Responses to Public Sector Reforms

In qualitative policy research examining community perceptions of public sector reforms, such as decentralization or welfare restructuring, the framework supports context-sensitive rigor. Philosophical coherence is achieved by aligning the research design with a constructivist perspective that values multiple stakeholder viewpoints. Credibility is reinforced through maximum variation sampling across affected communities and member checking to validate interpretations with participants. Data collection methods, including focus group discussions and key informant interviews, are complemented by document analysis of policy texts to strengthen triangulation. Dependability is addressed by clearly documenting changes in interview protocols as the study evolves in response to emerging insights. Confirmability is ensured through reflexive disclosure of the researcher's institutional or policy-related positionality and through transparent reporting of analytic procedures using SRQR standards. Transferability is enhanced by situating findings within detailed socio-political and cultural contexts, allowing policymakers and researchers to judge relevance to other reform settings. Ethical sensitivity particularly regarding power relations and participant confidentiality further supports trustworthiness and practical uptake of findings.

Example 3: Qualitative Governance and Public Sector Accountability Research

In qualitative governance research examining accountability mechanisms and ethical decision-making within public sector institutions, the proposed trustworthiness framework provides a structured approach to ensuring methodological rigor and policy relevance. Philosophical alignment is achieved through a constructivist interpretivist stance that recognizes governance practices as socially negotiated and institutionally embedded. Credibility is enhanced through purposive and criterion-based sampling of key stakeholders, including senior administrators, auditors, and frontline officers, combined with triangulation of semi-structured interviews, policy documents, and audit reports. Dependability is strengthened by maintaining a detailed audit trail that documents procedural decisions, changes in interview protocols, and analytic iterations as new governance issues emerge. Confirmability is addressed through reflexive disclosure of the researcher's positionality particularly where the researcher holds professional or institutional roles within the public sector and by grounding interpretations in thick, evidence-based quotations and documentary sources. Transferability is supported through rich contextual descriptions of the regulatory environment, institutional mandates, and accountability frameworks, enabling readers to assess relevance across comparable governance settings. Transparent reporting aligned with SRQR standards further enhances the credibility of findings, facilitating their use by policymakers, oversight bodies, and reform committees seeking evidence-informed improvements in public sector governance.

Operationalizing Trustworthiness: A Conceptual Framework for Practice

Following **Figure 2** illustrates the practical application of the proposed trustworthiness framework across diverse qualitative research contexts, demonstrating how credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are operationalized throughout the research process. The figure integrates philosophical and research design alignment with key methodological stages, showing how rigorous data collection, systematic and reflexive data analysis, researcher positionality, and transparent reporting collectively contribute to trustworthy qualitative outcomes. By mapping these core dimensions onto applied domains such as health services research, public policy analysis, and governance and accountability studies, the figure highlights the flexibility and cross-disciplinary relevance of the framework. Importantly, it emphasizes that trustworthiness is achieved not through isolated techniques or post hoc validation, but through the coherent and continuous integration of ethical sensitivity, contextual awareness, and methodological transparency across the entire qualitative research lifecycle

Limitations and Future Research

The review was confined primarily to English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles, which may have excluded valuable insights from non-English publications, regional outlets, and grey literature, thereby limiting the representation of context-specific perspectives, particularly from the Global South. In addition, the analysis focused largely on conceptual and methodological discussions rather than empirical examinations of how trustworthiness strategies are enacted in practice, meaning that the effectiveness of recommended techniques across disciplines and research settings remains insufficiently explored. While the proposed multidimensional framework integrates philosophical, methodological, researcher-related, reporting, and ethical–contextual factors, it does not empirically test the relative influence or interaction of these dimensions, leaving relationships such as the role of reflexivity in confirmability or the impact of reporting practices on transferability underexamined. Future research should therefore pursue empirical, comparative, and longitudinal studies to assess how specific trustworthiness practices are operationalized and with what outcomes across diverse qualitative approaches, cultural contexts, and emerging research designs, including digital and participatory methods. Greater methodological contributions from underrepresented regions, alongside mixed-method and meta-research approaches that examine interactions among trustworthiness dimensions, would further enhance the rigor, contextual sensitivity, and practical applicability of qualitative research.

Figure 2. Practical Application of Trustworthiness Framework Across Qualitative Research
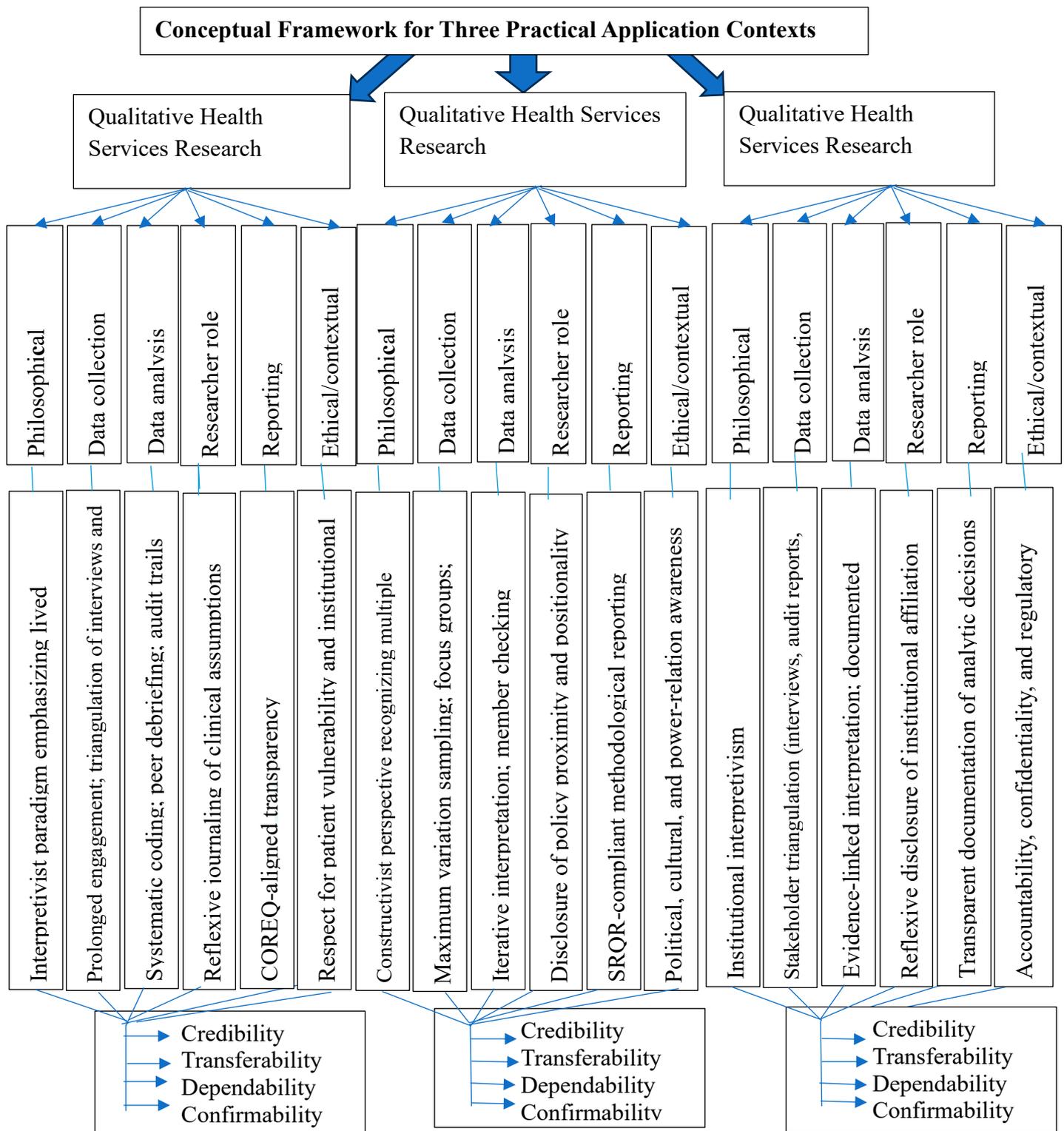
Source: Author research work

CONCLUSION

Trustworthiness is the cornerstone of high-quality qualitative research. This systematic literature review synthesizes global scholarly evidence on factors influencing trustworthiness and integrates classical and contemporary perspectives. Strengthening trustworthiness requires methodological rigor, reflexive practice, ethical integrity, and transparent reporting across the entire research process.

This systematic literature review provides a comprehensive and integrative synthesis of global scholarship on the factors influencing the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings. Drawing on 48 seminal and contemporary studies across diverse disciplines and geographical contexts, the review demonstrates that trustworthiness has evolved from a foundational, criterion-based construct into a multidimensional and process-oriented methodological orientation. Anchored in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) naturalistic framework, the analysis shows that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability remain central pillars of qualitative rigor; however, their realization depends on coherent alignment across philosophical positioning, research design, data collection, analysis, researcher reflexivity, reporting practices, and ethical-contextual sensitivity. The review highlights that trustworthiness is not achieved through isolated techniques or post hoc validation but is embedded throughout the entire research lifecycle as an integrated and reflexive practice.

By comparatively examining classical frameworks, process-based verification approaches, and contemporary reporting standards such as COREQ and SRQR, the study clarifies long-standing methodological debates between standardization and contextual flexibility. Rather than viewing these perspectives as competing, the findings suggest they are complementary: high-quality qualitative research requires both philosophical coherence and transparent documentation, supported by iterative, reflexive, and contextually grounded research practices. Importantly, the inclusion of international and Global South perspectives underscores that trustworthiness is inherently shaped by socio-cultural, ethical, and disciplinary contexts, challenging universalist applications of early Western models and reinforcing the need for context-sensitive methodological judgment.

Overall, this review makes a substantive methodological contribution by consolidating fragmented trustworthiness literature into a coherent analytical framework that is both theoretically grounded and practically applicable. The proposed synthesis offers clear guidance for qualitative researchers, supervisors, and journal reviewers seeking to design, conduct, evaluate, and report qualitative studies with greater rigor and transparency. By strengthening conceptual clarity and emphasizing trustworthiness as an integrated methodological stance rather than a checklist of techniques, this study enhances the credibility, applicability, and scholarly value of qualitative research across academic and applied fields.

REFERENCES

1. Anney, V. N. (2014). Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria. Journal of emerging trends in educational research and policy studies (jeteraps), 5(2), 272-281.
2. Barbour, R. S. (2001). Checklists for improving rigour in qualitative research: a case of the tail wagging the dog?. Bmj, 322(7294), 1115-1117.
3. Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. Qualitative research, 15(2), 219-234.
4. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative research in psychology, 3(2), 77-101.
5. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis?. Qualitative research in psychology, 18(3), 328-352.
6. Chandra, Y., & Shang, L. (2019). Qualitative research using R: A systematic approach.
7. Cope, D. G. (2014, January). Methods and meanings: credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. In Oncology nursing forum (Vol. 41, No. 1).
8. Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. Theory into practice, 39(3), 124-130.
9. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. Sage publications.
10. De Vos, A. S. (Ed.). (2002). Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human services professions. Van Schaik.
11. De Vos, A., Strydom, H., Fouche, C. and Delport, C. (2011) Research at Grass Roots: For Social Sciences and Human Services Professions. Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria.

12. Denzin, N. K., Lincoln, Y. S., MacLure, M., Otterstad, A. M., Torrance, H., Cannella, G. S., ... & McTier, T. (2017). Critical qualitative methodologies: Reconceptualizations and emergent construction. International Review of Qualitative Research, 10(4), 482-498.

13. Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. SAGE open, 4(1), 2158244014522633.

14. Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. Qualitative research, 2(2), 209-230.

15. Flick, U. (2022). An introduction to qualitative research.

16. Graneheim, U. H., & Lundman, B. (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. Nurse education today, 24(2), 105-112.

17. Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. Field methods, 18(1), 59-82.

18. Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). Fourth generation evaluation. Sage.

19. Hennink, M., Bailey, A., & Hutter, I. (2020). Qualitative research methods.

20. Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2011). Qualitative research methods. Sage Publications.

21. Koch, T. (1994). Establishing rigour in qualitative research: the decision trail. Journal of advanced nursing, 19(5), 976-986.

22. Koch T. (2006) Establishing rigour in qualitative research: the decision trail. Journal of

23. Advanced Nursing 53(1), 91–100

24. Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. European Journal of General Practice, 24(1), 120-124.

25. Kvale, S. (1995). The social construction of validity. Qualitative inquiry, 1(1), 19-40.

26. Liamputtong, P. (2013). The science of words and the science of numbers. Research method in health: foundations for evidence-based practice. South Melbourne: Oxford, 4-28.

27. Lincoln, Y. (1980). Guba. E.(1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills: Sage. LincolnNaturalistic Inquiry1985.

28. Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. The Sage handbook of qualitative research, 4(2), 97-128.

29. Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: standards, challenges, and guidelines. The lancet, 358(9280), 483-488.

30. Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: guided by information power. Qualitative health research, 26(13), 1753-1760.

31. Maxwell, J. A. (2012). A realist approach for qualitative research. Sage.

32. Maxwell, J. A. (2012). The importance of qualitative research for causal explanation in education. Qualitative inquiry, 18(8), 655-661.

33. Mays, N., & Pope, C. (2000). Assessing quality in qualitative research. Bmj, 320(7226), 50-52.

34. Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. International journal of qualitative methods, 1(2), 13-22.

35. Noble, H., & Smith, J. (2015). Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. Evidence-based nursing, 18(2), 34-35.

36. Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. International journal of qualitative methods, 16(1), 1609406917733847.

37. O'Brien, B. C., Harris, I. B., Beckman, T. J., Reed, D. A., & Cook, D. A. (2014). Standards for reporting qualitative research: a synthesis of recommendations. Academic medicine, 89(9), 1245-1251.

38. O'Cathain A. (2018). A practical guide to using qualitative research with randomized controlled trials. Oxford University Press.

39. O'Cathain, A. (2019). Mixed methods research: A guide to the field. Sage Publications.

40. Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods 3rd. ed. Sage publications.

41. Perera, N., & Fernando, P. (2018). Reflexivity and rigor in qualitative social research in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences, 41(2), 97–110.

42. Rolfe, G. (2006). Validity, trustworthiness and rigour: quality and the idea of qualitative research. Journal of advanced nursing, 53(3), 304-310.

43. Sandelowski, M. (1993). Rigor or rigor mortis: The problem of rigor in qualitative research revisited. Advances in nursing science, 16(2), 1-8.
44. Seale, C. (1999). The quality of qualitative research.
45. Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. Education for information, 22(2), 63-75.
46. Singh, K. D. (2015). Creating your own qualitative research approach: Selecting, integrating and operationalizing philosophy, methodology and methods. Vision, 19(2), 132-146.
47. Thorne, S. (2025). Interpretive description: Qualitative research for applied practice (p. 354). Taylor & Francis.
48. Thorne, S. (2016). Interpretive description: Qualitative research for applied practice (2nd ed.). Routledge.
49. Tobin, G. A., & Begley, C. M. (2004). Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework. Journal of advanced nursing, 48(4), 388-396.
50. Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): a 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. International journal for quality in health care, 19(6), 349-357.
51. Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. Qualitative inquiry, 16(10), 837-851.
52. Whittemore, R., Chase, S. K., & Mandle, C. L. (2001). Validity in qualitative research. Qualitative health research, 11(4), 522-537.
53. Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. Psychology and health, 15(2), 215-228.
54. Yardley, L. (2008). Demonstrating validity in qualitative health research. Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to methods, 235-251.