A Bibliometric Analysis of Hermeneutics Studies (2012-2021)

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Abstract

Hermeneutics (interpretation and understanding) has built a close connection with other subjects that need interpretative methods. With the development of society, the link between hermeneutics and other subjects becomes more profound, and at the same time, all of them further developed. It is essential to review the research on hermeneutics and explore its research trend. In this paper, two instruments, CiteSpace and VOSviewer, are applied to the bibliometric analysis. The Web of Science core collection database provides a fundamental resource for collecting data. Three thousand and one hundred and one articles are extracted and analyzed. Those data spanning ten years since 2012 can provide a clear and complete picture of research on hermeneutics. Through analysis, it can be found that 1) different regions or institutions' studies on hermeneutics present an imbalance, 2) this field combines more with medical aspects and also has promoted the development of other subjects, and 3) an initial downward trend is shown, 4) the exploration of translation filed or relevant research in terms of hermeneutics more emerge after 2017. The paper hopes that a clear and complete picture of hermeneutic study is presented to provide new perspectives for scholars and promote further development on subjects with the current trend.

Keywords: Hermeneutics; bibliometric analysis; CiteSpace; VOSviewer; research trend

1. Introduction

Hermeneutics is not an emerging concept for relevant research, and discussions have experienced at least a couple of decades. During its development, this field is progressively integrated into other studies as a research method or one individual subject. Each subject has its developmental stage, and so does this field. Furthermore, the links between hermeneutics and other disciplines are mainly based on their nature.

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation (Terry, 1890). Moreover, Terry says that this subject is not only a science but also an art. Hermeneutics regards truths and consequences as a science and views the application of principles and practical values as art. Many scholars had developed this subject such as Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Rudolf Bultmann (Anthony, 2009). Hermeneutics can cultivate open-mindedness, tolerance, receptiveness, and reciprocal listening with patience (Josef, 1983). Hermeneutics is a philosophical concept. When something refers to philosophy, people usually ask if it works in the life world. Actually, as a fundamental discipline, philosophy is no longer feasible. However, it can play a part when connected with other practical activities. So does hermeneutics. "Hermeneutics is a reflection on the reading and the interpretations of texts, and beyond that, it might be of speech and communication" (Dieter et al. 2010). Hermeneutics is applied to understand, to get better meaning. Human beings have an urgent need to make sense of things, while hermeneutics can satisfy their demands (Dieter et al. 2010). In the study of Hermeneutics, some objections exist. Lorenzo (2021) doubts this field's capability to treat intersubjectivity of communication fairly across different worlds and worries that it will threaten the unity of the objective world. On the whole, Hermeneutics advances people's capacity for understanding scientifically, and still plays a pivotal role in the combination of other disciplines and practices. In contrast, this subject also faces criticism and raises suspicion as everything is not perfect. Therefore, a question about hermeneutical contributions and significance has been raised, which can get answered in this paper.

Meanwhile, there is a review study related to hermeneutics. Liu and Li (2021) adopt the data from CNKI from 1991-2019 and mainly explore the topic of "hermeneutics + translation" employing bibliometric approaches. Their study indeed provides a clear recognition of how "hermeneutics + translation" has evolved in 30 years. However, the contribution to "hermeneutics" as a whole is limited. This paper will offer a wide horizon on this subject, rather than its links with only one discipline, by answering the following research questions:

- Q1) What are the publishing trends in this field?
- Q2) Which nations, and universities are actively working on hermeneutics?
- Q3) Which journals have usually been used to publish articles about hermeneutics and, to some extent, form authority in this field?
- Q4) What are the current hotspots and frontiers in the direction of hermeneutics?

2. Data and Methodology

2.1 Data

On December 31, 2021, data in this paper was obtained from the Web of Science Core Collection. Web of Science (WoS), the largest accessible citation database, provides various and new research information from different academic disciplines. It covers a large number of influential journals and conference proceedings. To obtain more adequate data, Core Collection is selected to retrieve literature. Based on its six online indexing databases, 5423 studies on hermeneutics are chosen. Among those studies, articles (4707, 86.7%) enjoy the most frequent document type; the second is book reviews (505, 9.3%); the third is early access (124, 2.2%); the fourth and the fifth are respectively editorial material (112, 2%) and review articles (75, 1.3%). Other document types are proceedings papers (38, 0.7%), meeting abstracts (13, 0.2%), corrections (6, 0.1%), book chapters (2, 0.03%), letters (2, 0.03%), bibliographies (1, 0.01%), biographical items (1, 0.01%), poetry (1, 0.01%). The selection criteria for this paper are that English articles and review articles can be analyzed. After this step, the final results are 3,101. The procedure of this paper is presented in Figure 1.

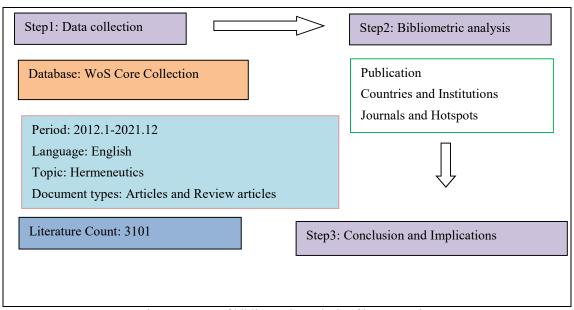


Figure 1. Steps of bibliometric analysis of hermeneutics

2.2 Methodology

Citespace, created by Chaomei Chen, is a popular visualization tool used by many scholars from different countries. As mentioned by Mr. Chen in his book *Citespace: A Practical Guide for Mapping Scientific Literature*, Citespace can provide sufficient and complete publications or research on one subject. Compared with traditional systematic reviews of literature, Citespace is based on computer algorithms that reduce labor burdens and provide adequate data without limitations and biases. With the foundations of network analysis and visualization, a landscape of a specific topic can be explored. It also shows what problems scholars try to solve and the research methods and tools utilized in their studies (Chen, 2016). VOSviewer incorporates the VOS mapping technique with good performance, increasing the functionality (Van Eck et al. 2008). It can be help for easily showing large bibliometric maps and focusing more on a graphical representation of bibliometric maps. VOSviewer has network visualization, overlay visualization, and density visualization and has the feature of scrolling, zooming, and searching, which makes it more detailed (Van Eck et al. 2010). Besides its function for bibliometric network analysis, VOSviewer can construct, visualize, and explore maps based on any type of network data (Van Eck et al., 2021).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Publications of Hermeneutics

From 2012 to December 31, 2021, 3101 studies have published on the WoS Core Collection about hermeneutics. The annual trend of publications is shown in Figure 2. In Figure 2, there are four stages from 2012 to 2021. In the first stage, from 2012 to 2016, the annual publications were about 200 without significant augmentation, meaning that the study was at a primary stage of development. The second stage was from 2016 (196 papers) to 2017 (413 papers), which showed fantastic growth. It was evidenced that scholars turned to attach importance to the study of this field. In the third stage, from 2017 to 2020, the study on hermeneutics entered a relatively steady time with annual publications above 400, with lower publications in 2018 (381 papers). In 2020, the number of publications (510 papers) reached the highest in ten years. In the four stages, from 2020

to 2021 (423 papers), the research showed a decrease in publication. Regardless of the slight decline in 2021, the recent years have witnessed more tremendous enthusiasm from scholars than the period of 2012-2016.

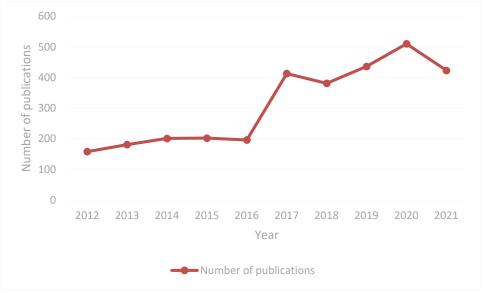


Figure 2. Number of publications of hermeneutics (2012-2021)

3.2 Analysis of Countries and Institutions

It is important to analyze the distribution of countries and institutions in one subject's research. In this way, scholars can get a clear insight into devotion to this topic from different regions worldwide and the dedication from various institutions. From Figure 3, the nodes represent the number of publications in different countries. And the centrality is as follows: USA > England > Germany > Sweden > South Africa/ Australia/ France>Canada/ Finland/ Spain> Brazil/ Netherlands. The USA enjoys the highest centrality, 0.12. It shows a relationship of cooperation between the USA and other countries such as England, Germany, and Canada. The United States has the largest number of 791 publications, followed by England (235 publications) and South Africa (192 publications). A combination of specific figures and Figure 3 signals that the developed countries participate more actively hermeneutics research. Meanwhile, developing countries like South Africa, and China have gotten a cut of their studies on this topic. It is advised that emerging nations strengthen academic ties with developed ones to advance disciplinary development.

Some institutions that pay attention to hermeneutics research are shown in Figure 4. The links among these institutions prove their cooperative relationship. The node size represents the number of publications. The University of Pretoria has made the most remarkable contributions in this field for ten years (50 papers). Further exploration discovers that most of the publications from the University of Pretoria focus on "religion" by hermeneutics. Beyers (2021) tries to find the boundary between superstition and religion through elucidating the border of religion. Abo Akademi University enjoys the second position and has published 36 papers, followed by the University of Gothenburg (35 papers), the University of Calgary (32 papers), and North-West University (27 papers), respectively. Though the University of Pretoria enjoys the highest publications, its centrality is only 0.02, which indicates less cooperation with other institutions. In the top 10 institutions, the University of Gothenburg is the highest in centrality, 0.12. It has cooperated with Abo Akademi University, the University of Copenhagen and some other institutions on hermeneutics.

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Figure 3. Network Analysis of Countries in terms of Hermeneutics (2012-2021)

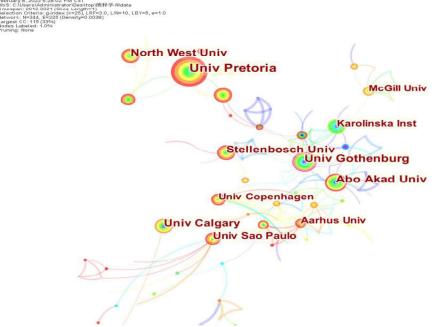


Figure 4. Network Analysis of Institutions in terms of hermeneutics (2012-2021)

3.3 Analysis of Co-citation of Journals

Prominent journals with a large number of citations are extracted from the whole data and presented in Figure 5. And the detailed contents of those journals are shown in Table 1. From Figure 5, there are two clusters of ten journals. All of them are relevant to the medical fields, such as nursing, and health, which indicates that health care produces a close connection with hermeneutics. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (IJQM), with its impact factor of 4.628, shows its good influence, followed by *Social Science & Medicine* with an impact factor of 4.338, *International Journal of Nursing Studies* with 4.183. Studies on IJQM are primarily involved in methodological innovations, advances, and insights in qualitative or mixed methods research. *Social Science & Medicine* with its highest H-index of 213 among the ten prominent journals, followed by *Journal of Advanced Nursing* with an H-index of 136, which shows the journals have a particular academic influence. Papers about

hermeneutics are issued in such journals, which indicates that this field has played an essential role in medical research and development. Moreover, through those journals, an apparent trend or research mainstream of hermeneutics is presented.

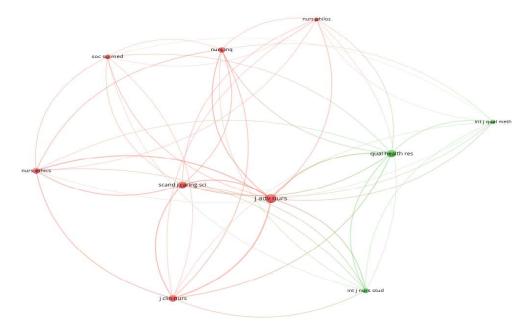


Figure 5. Co-citation of journals in terms of hermeneutics based on VOSviewer (2012-2021)

Table 1. The details of co-citation journals in terms of hermeneutics (2012-2021)

Journals	Citations	Total	H Index	IF
		link strength		
Journal of Advanced Nursing	585	5928	136	2.906
Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences	384	3930	58	1.795
Qualitative Health Research	426	3850	95	3.176
Journal of Clinical Nursing	334	3507	87	2.373
Nursing Ethics	264	3075	50	2.597
Nursing Inquiry	220	2447	46	2.306
International Journal of Nursing Studies	201	2058	91	4.183
International Journal of Qualitative Methods	142	1270	16	4.628
Nursing Philosophy	111	1269	29	1.121
Social Science & Medicine	160	1215	213	4.338

3.4 Keywords Timeline View

In Figure 6, there are seven clusters in which some important keywords are included. Vertically, keywords such as "care, experience, hermeneutics, life, perspective, science, management, perception, education" emerged in 2012 and always enjoyed the attention of scholars in the next decade. Each year has its new keyword with various attention. Horizontally, relevant keywords will be classified into one cluster. For example, "education, behavior, identity, language, achievement" belong to Cluster #5 grounded theory. The links in the timeline view also prove the timespan of keywords. "Life, care, experience" such keywords were presented in each year's paper with a timespan of ten years. The keyword "theology" only had one-year timespan from 2020 to 2021. Through the timeline view, keywords that most studies in 2012 or at the beginning of the 10-year period concentrated are shown. Moreover, during that period, those keywords that gained much attention from researchers are related to religion, nursing, and others. Then, with the development of hermeneutics, the keywords present diversity, which signals that this subject is on the way to an interdisciplinary study, continuously exchanging with other fields. The keywords as "sociology, adolescent, student, law, history, big data, innovation" can prove this.

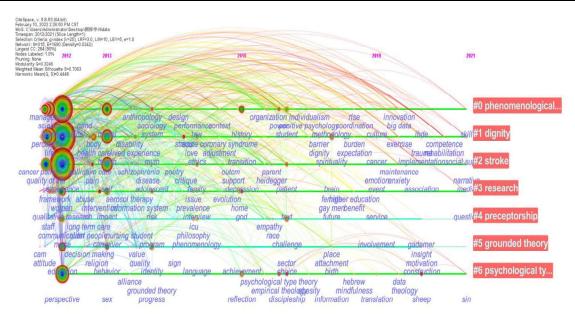


Figure 6. Keywords timeline view in terms of hermeneutics (2012-2021)

3.5 Keyword Citation Bursts

There are the top 13 keywords in figure 7. The red part is on behalf of the start year of one emerging keyword and the end year of losing much attention of this keyword. For example, "staff" firstly occurred in 2012, and "symptom" emerged in 2013, while both of them lasted for five years, the longest research time in figure 6. Souza et al. (2015) use dialectic hermeneutics to study the work process of nursing staff whose job is about drug users in mental health and conclude that those staffs have work, and their mental exhaustion is more severe than a physical one. Karlsson et al. (2013) analyze the interviews of certified nursing assistants in dementia care through philosophical hermeneutics and find that perception of pain for those assistants originates from compassion, closeness, dialogue based on personality as well as specialized knowledge of dementia and pain, and point out ethical caring and individual pain experiences of nursing assistants play an essential part. And in 2012, three keyword bursts (women, quality of life, and staff) became the most significant number of keyword citation bursts in one year. For example, Soderberg et al. (2012) try to make sense of Swedish women's ideas on childbearing on the basis of the hermeneutic method and discuss two dimensions of childbearing: immanence and transcendence. Kowalski et al. (2012) allude to the importance of interpreting quality of life (QOL) measurements and differences under the context of the usage of QOL outcomes in clinical trials. "Ethics" emerged in 2015, had lasted four years. Fuller (2015) discusses the development of big data and points out that it cannot only bring new problems, including ethical aspects, but also show opportunities to many scholars in various research fields covering hermeneutics. From 2015 to 2021, new keywords actively emerged in this field, providing a dynamic academic atmosphere. For instance, Maher et al. (2015) utilize hermeneutics to analyze the viability and potential opportunities of public health nutrition (PHN) meddling in community pharmacy with more attention to mothers and infants and conclude that PHN action should reflect on evidence accurately and ethically for mothers and infants. Valizadeh et al. (2016) explore preceptorship between nurse preceptors and new nurses and consider it as a challenging role with pressure and hope in which relevant policies and guidelines can be implemented to develop a preceptorship program, thus promoting positive and active outcomes for both sides. Dickinson (2017) argues that there is a need to explore the hermeneutics of eschatology and understand it as the structure of history rather than a dualism to be discarded. In Dickinson's article, "micro-politics" is one of the keywords. Brodin (2018) focuses on doctoral students' creativity and tries to learn the types of students' creativity under Swedish doctoral education and found reasons for confining creativity. Levitskaya et al. (2018) utilize the comparative hermeneutic approach in analyzing teachers' and students' role in the films set in the national socialist period and find that in those films, teachers' task was to serve national strategy and help students form national socialist view rather than academic literacy. McCaffrey (2019) connects carnal hermeneutics with nursing, paying attention to medical nursing and mental health nursing, respectively. Lorentsen et al. (2019) use a hermeneutic qualitative design to interpret the patients' experiences with bodily changes caused by cancer. Through deep insight into those patients' experiences, nurses can have a fuller understanding of them. In this process, patients can feel more love, which is conducive to enhancing their dignity. Based on philosophical hermeneutics, Laing et al. (2020) explore the impacts on oncology healthcare providers after watching digital stories of adults with cancer. The research finds that those digital stories can give

strong emotion, and deep reflection to healthcare workers, helping the development of a professional cure and the good relationship between patients and their doctors.

Keywords Year Strength Begin End 2012 - 2021 2012 3.06 2012 2014 women quality of life 2012 2.84 2012 2013 2.67 2012 2016 2012 staff 2012 3.31 2013 2017 symptom value 2012 2.6 2014 2015 2.48 2015 2018 2012 ethics 2.41 2015 2016 prevalence 2012 3.41 **2016** 2017 2012 program politics 2012 2.56 2016 2018 2.84 2017 2018 2012 student mental health 2012 2.64 2018 2019 2012 2.5 2018 2019 dignity 2012 2.47 2019 2021 cancer

Top 13 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

Figure 7. Results of the strongest citation bursts in terms of Hermeneutic (2012-2021)

3.6 Co-occurrence Analysis of Keywords

Judging from Figure 8, Cluster #0 (red color block) enjoys the largest number of keywords, 57. The larger the area of the color block, the more keywords the cluster includes. Keywords in a shared cluster represent the close relationship among them. The seven cluster labels mean that they are highly representative in the relative clusters. For example, the keywords in Cluster #5 have relatively close links with others in this cluster, and "grounded theory" is the representative one among them. Some details about the seven clusters are as follow:

Cluster #0 relates to "phenomenological hermeneutics," which is frequently mentioned when referring to "hermeneutics" this subject. It is a result of the work of Gadamer and Heidegger and phenomenological thought. Behind this term lies the content of the philosophical and theoretical frame, which is rigorous and detailed (Suddick et al., 2020).

For example, Gorichanaz (2017) explores one's experiences with information based on auto-hermeneutics, which consists of phenomenological method, self-observation, and interpretative analysis, which helps people deepen their understanding of information experiences.

Cluster #1, #2 and #4 share similarities, relating to "dignity" "stroke" and "preceptorship." Moreover, the three clusters have terms of the medical field in common such words as care, health care, symptom, pain, patient, palliative care, recovery, survivor, and ICU. The three clusters indicate that the function of interpretation of hermeneutics benefits the development of a medical career.

For example, Ohlen et al. (2017) study person-centered care in the field of palliative care through the hermeneutics of self and explore the problem of individualization or standardization in this field.

Johansson et al (2015) take advantage of the hermeneutic approach to explore people's experiences with diaries recording their relatives in the ICU. Through analysis, the diaries can provide hope and convincing information, as if people were caring for their relatives at the bedside. Some adverse impacts of the diaries are also shown, such as the feeling of failure, and stress.

Rolfe (2015), one of the researchers during this period, notes the phenomenon of nurses being unable to care, discusses the research-based practice of nursing, and suggests that attention should be paid to individual persons rather than statistical methods, which can trace from the hermeneutics and the existential-phenomenological approach.

Cluster #3 shares similarities with each other clusters, which can get this conclusion from its label "research" and other keywords such as "qualitative research, impact, framework".

Cluster #5 focuses on the theory relating to people, such as education, behavior, decision-making, and language. For example, Zembylas et al. (2018) use critical hermeneutics to explore the process of religious education, teachers' practice, and teacher professional development. Yagata (2018) examines the practical application of self-cultivation, culture, and education to second language teacher education on the basis of philosophical hermeneutics. It seems that different branches of hermeneutics are applied to various aspects of education, such as religion, and second language. In the same way, it may be feasible for scholars to choose an appropriate branch of hermeneutics to study other aspects of education, such as relating to children with disability, and continuing education.

For example, Rahman et al. (2021) employ phenomenological hermeneutics to analyze the causes of gender disparity in investment decisions and find that those socio-cultural traditions are the major factors in which profitability and religiosity are two main themes. The above research, to some extent, reflects that hermeneutics, as an analytical method, can explain the social phenomenon that confuses people, thus charting the course for solving problems or improving conditions.

Cluster #6 refers to the "psychological type theory." This cluster is related to "discipleship, psychological type theory, empirical theology, translation, consumption," and so on. For instance, Stefanink et al. (2017) explore the feasibility of the hermeneutical approach in the translation process. Stefanink et al. note that some elements such as corporeality, and subjectivity share similarities with the translation process and point out the foundation of translational hermeneutics, the tendency to a holistic approach. Oseki-Depre et al. (2019) try to clarify the relationship between hermeneutics and translation and the definition of translation by citing the opinions of Antoine Berman and George Steiner from the perspective of classic hermeneutics. Martinengo (2020) discusses the relationship of political philosophy with translation theory based on the view of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. In Cluster #6, attention to hermeneutics in translation field can be presented. The translation, which is also an interdisciplinary, links with hermeneutics, whether from the translation process or theory, will burst out great energy and form a positive cycle among academic research.

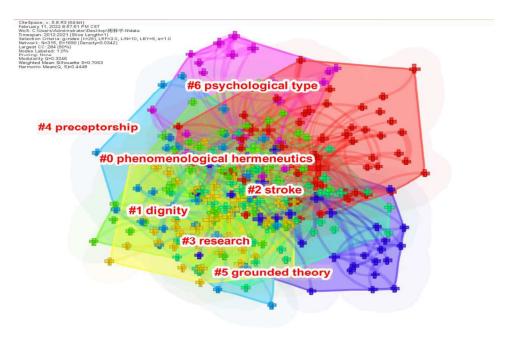


Figure 8. Co-occurrence analysis of keywords in terms of hermeneutics (2012-2021)

3.7 Analysis of keywords of overlay visualization

As shown in Figure 9, different keywords are endowed with some types of colors. The deeper the color of keywords is, the earlier the research starts. The color of keywords represents research time, which reflects the research topics and trends to some extent by the color transition. Some keywords such as quality of life, narratives, Buddhism, lived experience, and philosophy of religion with deeper color were shown before 2016. The keywords "sin, intercultural hermeneutics, patriarchy, public theology, Chinese philosophy, pandemic, Covid-19" emerged after 2018.

Bo (2018), one of the researchers during this period, discusses two approaches to Chinese philosophy: focus on interpretation and inheritance or theoretical creation based on academic norms and standards, and puts forward the prevailing situation of the first approach and relatively weak place of the second one, thus calling for a more harmonious and dynamic study on

Chinese philosophy. Bhat (2021) uses the feminist hermeneutical approaches to question dominant male meanings in Qur'an chapter 4, verse 34, examines the patriarchy's influence on this verse, and emphasizes women's way of understanding Islam and their position. Covid-19 happened in 2019 and also got scholars' attention concerning hermeneutics. Buffel (2021) employs theological liberative hermeneutics to prove that the Bible is central in the struggles and lived experiences of the poor under the background of poverty and Covid-19 and solve some misconceptions about liberation theologies. Nielsen and Liakos (2020) point out that mutual understanding is not enough in the United States on the basis of the example of wearing masks and advise people about seeing themselves in a new way with the help of hermeneutics when facing the Covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, they hope the research is beneficial to political dialogue in the context of the epidemic. Belyaev and Matushanskaya (2021) argue that apocalyptic literature has a close relation with the Covid-19 pandemic and that this crisis is a rehearsal of the apocalypse. And they analyze the representative opinions of different Christian confessions in the post-Soviet region and try to find a proper hermeneutic paradigm.

The Covid-19 epidemic has wreaked havoc on economic, political, medical, and other fields across the globe since its outbreak. All experts conduct relevant studies by combining professional knowledge, promoting a dynamic academic development on this plague.

Within the review of hermeneutics, it is discovered that this topic focuses more on the living situation of people under the backdrop of the pandemic, such as wearing masks, re-examining people themselves, and it is also involved in concerns for the vulnerable group, the following problems about political dialogue, and like the previous studies, it also participates in the investigations about the nurses and their patients ailed by pneumonia.

Overall, the research in the medical field with hermeneutics has been throughout the development of both subjects.

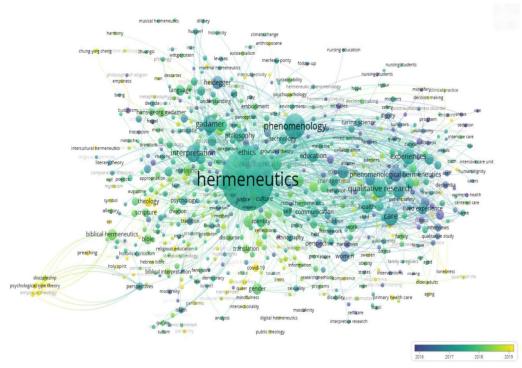


Figure 9. Overlay visualization of keywords of hermeneutics based on VOSviewer (2012-2021)

4. Conclusion and Implications

Considering the importance of review on hermeneutics and the lack of this relevant research, the author utilizes two bibliometric instruments to analyze the data collected from the Web of Science Core Collection, hoping that clear insight into hermeneutics can be provided and scholars can explore new research perspectives.

From 2012 to 2021, 3,101 papers are retrieved from the WoS core database. The ten years have witnessed the initial stage, rapid-growth period, its peak, and slump of research on hermeneutics. This field contains a wide range of topics, including phenomenology, nursing, psychology, education, and theology.

Next, the United States is the most productive country in this field and plays a prominent part. At the same time, England, South Africa, and Canada contribute a lot to this field. On the whole, countries publishing a large number of papers are from Europe, South America, Africa, and Oceania, respectively, and most of them are from Europe, which concludes that Asian countries pay less attention to this field and there is an imbalance across districts. Hermeneutics originated in Europe, which may partly cause this phenomenon. The University of Pretoria has the largest number of publications among institutions. It is from South Africa, which means that nearly a quarter of the number of publications in South Africa comes from the University of Pretoria. Furthermore, some countries and institutions will cooperate with others to some extent.

Analyses of keywords include timeline view, citation bursts, co-occurrence analysis, and overlay visualization. From the timeline view, important keywords that emerged in each year can reflect research focus in each year and general research direction. From "cancer patient, body, palliative care" to "law, language, innovation, big data," each year shows something new in hermeneutic research. From citation bursts, some new keywords can be easily captured together with their period, which can embody the extent of people's interest and research value. Like "symptom" with five years timespan presents a high value and more interest from scholars. Co-occurrence analysis shows several different clusters, which means keywords with high correlation will be divided into the same cluster. Overlap among those clusters indicates their connections to the study of hermeneutics. Due to the different colors on overlay visualization, the latest research on hermeneutics can be gotten easily. The keywords with yellow color are scholars' new research foci. Various information on hermeneutics can be obtained from keywords analysis.

Co-citation journals prove that a whole research trend on hermeneutics focuses on the medical field. *Social Science & Medicine* with a high h-index of 213, *Journal of Advanced Nursing* with an h-index of 136, and other high-citation journals are relevant to the medical field, which shows that applying hermeneutics to medical studies is of great significance.

Briefly speaking, the study of hermeneutics is involved with many other disciplines. It contains medical studies, psychology, education, theology, and so on. Through hermeneutic methods, more information and understanding about one subject can be obtained and further promote the development of this subject.

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