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What is Qualitative Research?



TIP

Quantitative methods are usually the most appropriate if you want to find out social facts or the causes of some phenomenon. Qualitative methods are best suited if you want to ask 'what' and 'how' questions.



LINK

Ben Goldacre's column in the UK newspaper the *Guardian* (see www.badscience.net/) looks at how the press reports (and distorts) scientific research.



LINK

For articles on the qualitative–quantitative debate:
www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-e/inhalt1-01-e.htm

RECOMMENDED READING

This paper reports findings from a national survey of British sociology students' attitudes towards quantitative methods.

(Continued)

2 part one Theory and Method in Qualitative Research

(Continued)

Sociology, 42 (5): 1003–21 (2008):

<http://soc.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/42/5/1003>

'Does British Sociology Count? Sociology Students' Attitudes toward Quantitative Methods' by Malcolm Williams, University of Plymouth (malcolm.williams@plymouth.ac.uk); Geoff Payne, University of Newcastle (geoff.payne@newcastle.ac.uk); Liz Hodgkinson, University of Plymouth (liz.hodgkinson@plymouth.ac.uk); Donna Poade, University of Plymouth (donna.poade@plymouth.ac.uk).

EXERCISE

- 1 List your reasons for being interested in qualitative research.
- 2 What numerical skills do you have?
- 3 If these skills were better, would you be more interested in quantitative research?
- 4 For what kind of topics is qualitative research the best option?

How useful is the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods? This paper argues that it is best to treat research methods as a continuum from which we select methods depending on our research question.

Educational Researcher, 35 (5): 14–23 (2006)

<http://edr.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/35/5/14>:

What Good Is Polarizing Research Into Qualitative and Quantitative?

Kadriye Ercikan, Associate Professor of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, and Wolff-Michael Roth, Lansdowne Professor of Applied Cognitive Science, University of Victoria, Canada.

EXERCISE

- How far are (a) qualitative and (b) quantitative methods suitable for your research topic?
- What difference does it make to the methodology you use if you are looking for facts or 'facts'?

This paper presents the advantages of integrating quantitative information in qualitative data collection, analysis and reporting, and the potential problems created by such uses and how these can be dealt with. It also addresses the definition of mixed methods research, arguing that the use of numbers by itself does not make a study 'mixed methods'.

Qualitative Inquiry, 6 (6), 475–82 (2010):
<http://qix.sagepub.com/content/16/6/475>

Using Numbers in Qualitative Research
 Joseph A. Maxwell

What reasons are there for combining qualitative and quantitative methods and what happens when we do combine them? Bryman's paper reviews over 200 social science articles to see what happens in practice.

Qualitative Research, 6 (1), 97–113 (2006):
<http://qrj.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/6/1/97>

Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: how is it done?

Alan Bryman, University of Leicester

Is it possible to synthesise qualitative and quantitative research findings? This paper examines over 40 research papers on HIV/AIDS to try to answer this question.

Field Methods, 20 (1), 3–25 (2008):
<http://fmx.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/20/1/3>

Making Sense of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings in Mixed Research Synthesis Studies

Corrine I. Voils, Durham Veterans Affairs Medical Center and Duke University Medical Center; Margarete Sandelowski, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Nursing; Julie Barroso, Duke University School of Nursing; Victor Hasselblad, Clinical Research Institute, Duke University Medical Center

EXERCISE

- List the reasons why it might make sense for you to combine qualitative and quantitative methods on your research project.
- Now review the counter-argument (e.g. if you are thinking of using multiple methods, consider whether quantitative methods are appropriate to your theoretical model and whether you would have the time to do a good job by using multiple methods).

4 part one Theory and Method in Qualitative Research

The following two articles debate whether naturally occurring material should be the basic data for qualitative research. Susan Speer raises several reservations about the value of this assumption:

DEBATE

'Natural' and 'contrived' data: a sustainable distinction?

Susan A. Speer, Brunel University

Discourse Studies, 4 (4): 511–25 (2002):

<http://dis.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/4/4/511>

In the paper below, Jonathan Potter replies to Susan Speer, arguing that naturally occurring data remain highly relevant to qualitative research.

DEBATE

Two kinds of natural

Jonathan Potter, Loughborough University

Discourse Studies, 4 (4): 539–42 (2002):

<http://dis.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/4/4/539>

EXERCISE

- Is your research based on naturally occurring data?
- If so, why?
- If not, why not?
- If you worked with a different sort of data (naturally occurring or otherwise) how would that impact on your definition of your research topic and the kind of conclusions you could reach?

Quantitative & Qualitative 2.02 minutes

www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIMMkE2IPj4&feature=related

A humorous look at the nonsense of qualitative and quantitative research.

Using Wikis to Conduct Qualitative Research 6.47 minutes

www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwfceBwNmuk

Explains an approach to using online technology, such as 'wikis', to facilitate collecting of qualitative research data collaboratively within a team.

David Silverman on Qualitative Research Methods & Natural Data Part 1 7.21 minutes

www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVnIO4vzXg8

Sources of naturally occurring data and the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative approaches to research questions.

David Silverman on Qualitative Methods & Natural Data Part 2 6.48 minutes

www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW_SKXYnhyQ&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL

Continues to understanding on how to approach data analysis, with examples.