

Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches

Abstract

There is a place for theory in all the three approaches to research namely mixed, quantitative, and qualitative methods. In a qualitative approach, a concept is used to offer the probabilities and clarifications among parameters being studied. The theory forms a bridge among the variables. On the other hand, in qualitative research, a theory is employed to bring wide explanations on the variables being studied. In fact, it can also act as a perspective or theoretical lens that raises questions across several categories or groups or an inductive generalization from the collection and analysis of data. Finally, studies show that mixed approach brings together the two approaches namely qualitative and quantitative.

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Introduction

Theory plays an important role in mixed, quantitative, and qualitative research techniques. In quantitative approach, the researcher normally gets answers to the questions by testing theories. In qualitative research on the other hand, the researcher might come up with a theory as the end-result of a project or use it at the beginning to act as a guide to the questions and focus of the research (Thomas, 1997).

The role of theory in quantitative research

A theory is defined in quantitative research as a group of related variables brought together in hypotheses or propositions that give light on the relationship between the aspects of direction and magnitude among various variables. Theory is used as a predictor of occurrences. In most cases, carrying out of several tests on the predictions may lead to the development of a theory (Flinders & Mills, 1993).

The use of theories in quantitative research is deductive and such theories are found at the start of the study's proposal. The objective is usually to verify or test a theory as the researcher collects data used to verify the accuracy of the theory to confirm or deny it based on the results. Theory forms a framework upon which the entire study is based thus forming the criteria for data collection and the basis of the hypotheses and questions (Reynolds, 2007).

The role of theory in qualitative research

One of the main uses of theory in quantitative research is for the explanation of attitudes and behaviors. In fact, the usage usually comes up with hypotheses, constructs and variables. Researchers can also use a perspective or a

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theoretical lens in their research. The lens becomes a determinant or guide on the data collection procedures and methods, types of questions, an approach of data analysis as well as gives direction on what changes should be made or actions to be taken. The application helps the researcher to get the direction on important issues and areas of focus as well as how to be place himself in the study in a way that will be balanced (Reynolds, 2007).

In a qualitative research, there are instances when a theory can become an end. The process starts with collecting sufficient information and putting the information into themes or categories. The themes are developed into wider theories or patterns that can then be compared to the literature already in existence or the experiences at personal level (Creswell, 2009).

The role of theory in mixed methods

There are studies that use theory both in a deductive way to test and verify (quantitative theory) and in an inductive way to show the emergence of a pattern (qualitative theory). Nursing and collective discipline concepts can form an outline for investigating qualitative and quantitative surveys. A perspective of a theoretical lens can also be used in a study to understand several aspects of diversity like sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, race or gender (Mertens, 2003).

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The use of theoretical lens in a mixed study gives focus on a research that is action oriented and based on values. The approach usually suggests applying divergent methods, focusing on action solutions and bringing together the commitment to the values of various traditions.

Conclusion

As illustrated above, theory has a role to play in mixed, qualitative, and quantitative studies. Theory guides in the formation of hypotheses, questions, data collection and analysis procedures. A theory therefore plays a part in selecting an approach for a study. However, a theory may not be used the same way for all researches given that studies employ different methods during data collection and analysis.

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