

Chapter 3

Mixed Methods Research: It Is About Deliberate Fusion

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ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to investigate the use of convergent mixed methods design, explanatory mixed methods design, exploratory mixed methods design, embedded mixed method design, transformative mixed methods design, and multiphase mixed methods design in 61 mixed methods-based LIS doctoral dissertations and theses completed between 2006 and 2018, retrieved from the ProQuest Library Science Database. Their retrieval was achieved through search for the term “mixed methods” in the abstract, based on the assumption that each author mentions their research method in the abstract. The aim is to assess the effectiveness of mixed methods use, including advantages and possible challenges of each type. The premise for doing so is that the mixing of methods must be a deliberate, skillfully crafted, not a haphazardly concocted fusion.

INTRODUCTION

The development of a mixed methods research (MMR) approach has been evolving but had a very slow beginning. Maxwell (2016, p.11) points out that “textbooks, handbooks, and journal articles have typically ignored a great deal of earlier and contemporary research that integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches”. While the predominant research approach in the 1930s was acknowledged to be quantitative, with Paul Felix Lazarsfeld conducting surveys in Vienna, Leech (2010) quotes Teddlie and Johnson (2009) who, in reference to that research orientation, reveal that “19th Century methodologists could be identified as beginning the movement”. Meanwhile, Thyer and Holosko (2016) suggest that the use of qualitative research dates to the 19th century. This supports a similar point made by Leech (2010) who quotes Denzin and Lincoln (2005) alluding to a slightly different timeline suggesting that “the history of the qualitative approach in North America began in the early 1900s”. When it comes to the third ap-

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proach, Mertens (2018) suggests that “the history of the use of mixed methods can also be traced back to the 1800s”, thus confirming that quantitative and qualitative research was already taking place in the 19th century. While not purposefully referring to the practice as MMR, Mertens (2018) points out that the 19th century evaluators and researchers “intuitively came to the conclusion that evaluations on complex social programs could be enhanced by the use of multiple methods; hence the combination of both quantitative and qualitative data in the same study”. Maxwell (2016, p. 12) points out that though the practice of mixing the two approaches started much earlier, MMR became identifiable as a “distinct and self-conscious strategy” in the 1980s and early 1990s.

BACKGROUND

In the introduction, it was revealed that the practice of MMR occurred from decades before it was formally acknowledged, creating a literature gap. A focus on it as the third approach gradually materialized in the 1980s as some researchers argued that there is no point in taking opposing perspectives to the extent of not seeing the legitimacy in other approaches to doing research. Thereafter, MMR has grown substantially as a fusion. A fusion is a distinct entity formed by the combining of two or more different things. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica Academic* online (2021) defines it as “a merging of diverse, distinct, or separate elements into a unified whole” and proceeds to use an opera as an example. In research matters, a fusion of two or more research approaches has a distinct result that is different from the results of each of the same approaches standing individually. This is like the result of musical instruments played in a unified way to produce a consolidated operatic sound. Thus, currently it is acknowledged that there are three main research approaches: the quantitative, qualitative, and MMR approaches (Creswell, 2010 & 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2010).

DEFINING A RESEARCH APPROACH

A research approach is an essential element of research methodology, which directly affects specific research methods. Creswell (2014) defines the research approach as plans and procedures made and undertaken during an empirical study. These move from the broad assumptions to data collection methods, data analysis, and data interpretation. The research approach is made up of the philosophical worldviews and the methods employed in an empirical study that relate to that worldview (Creswell 2014). The research approach can be divided into inductive and deductive categories or qualitative and quantitative methods, respectively.

Newman and Benz (1998), and Creswell (2014), point out that quantitative and qualitative approaches represent different ends of a continuum, and Cameron (2015) reinforces the same view about a MMR existing in the middle of this continuum. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2021) defines a continuum as a continuous sequence in which adjacent elements are not perceptibly different from each other, but the extremes are quite distinct. This implies that the transition from quantitative to qualitative emphasis can be fluid, especially that the ideal is to experience a bit of both in an organized manner. A MMR approach is closely linked to the pragmatism worldview or paradigm which employs both positivism and interpretivism paradigms (Ngulube, 2015).

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