

Chapter 26

Application of the Convergent Mixed Methods Research Design in the Study of Email Records Management in Zimbabwe's Central Government

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ABSTRACT

Mixed methods research, the so called “third methodological movement,” has come as a great relief to scholars who do not subscribe to the polarised qualitative and quantitative research approaches alone. It has plugged the gap between the two approaches and has capitalised on the strengths of the two as well. In fact, it tells a complete story from both ends, thus adding and aiding comprehension and comprehensiveness at the same time. Many researchers have had difficulties in correctly using and applying the mixed methods research approach. Through use of the convergent mixed methods research design, the chapter helps to show why, how, and where quantitative and qualitative elements can be correctly and effectively mixed in pursuit of assessing email management strategies and the importance thereof in Zimbabwe's central government.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Prior to the 1980s, the dominant research approaches were the quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Marutha, 2020). Scholars had to choose one of these approaches each time they engaged in research discourse. The quantitative and qualitative research approaches stood in sharp contrast to each other and many times, scholars were at pains to support their preferred approach as opposed to the other.

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However, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the rise to prominence of the mixed methods research approach (Ngulube, 2020). The mixed methods research approach, the so-called “third methodological movement” came as an alternative to researchers who did not entirely subscribe to the quantitative or qualitative research approaches alone (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012, p. 776). The approach has evolved to become a practical and complementary method for researchers who prefer to look at phenomena from multiple angles with multiple lenses, that is, from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

Different scholars have defined “mixed methods research” in different ways. It should be noted that the most practical and useful definitions bring out the idea of purposeful mixing, matching and synthesising of quantitative and qualitative elements at many or all phases of the research in a single study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Marutha, 2020; Ngulube, 2020). As a “new” approach on the block, mixed methods research has been wrongly used or applied by many researchers who have tended to haphazardly throw into the fray quantitative and qualitative elements. Some have tended to mix quantitative and qualitative elements at one stage of the research, most notably, the data collection phase, which Marutha (2020) and Ngulube (2020) see as not very appropriate as they hold that mixing should be conducted at many or all phases of the research process. This brings in the significance of this chapter based on the management of email where mixed methods researchers and would-be mixed methods researchers can take a leaf and stand guided on how to apply the mixed methods research approach in line with demands and expectations of the convergent mixed methods research design.

There are many mixed methods research designs, for example, the explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential, convergent, embedded, multi-phase and the transformative research designs (Molina-Arizon & Fetters, 2016). However, the first three research designs stated above have rather emerged as the ‘signature’ mixed methods research designs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Each of these designs is used where most applicable, or else, it would not serve a very meaningful purpose. The three mixed methods research designs have very close resemblance and this has many times resulted in researchers wrongly using them interchangeably. Thus, although the focus of this chapter is to outline the use of the convergent mixed methods research design, it is worthwhile to briefly outline what each of these three research designs is all about.

The explanatory sequential mixed methods research design is many times used to investigate phenomena that has not been studied before (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). It involves collection of quantitative data first followed by collection of qualitative data where qualitative findings are used to either confirm or disconfirm quantitative findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative data is predominant and so the “QUANT + qual” notation applies in the case of the explanatory sequential research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The exploratory sequential research design is mostly used where a researcher investigates a problem that is not clearly defined (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It involves collection of qualitative data first followed by collection of quantitative data to confirm or disconfirm qualitative findings. In exploratory mixed methods research design, qualitative data is more predominant and so the design assumes the notation “QUAL + quant” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In convergent research design, also called the parallel or concurrent research design, a researcher collects and analyses both quantitative and qualitative data separately before he or she compares the results to determine how they confirm or disconfirm each other (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the context of this chapter, quantitative data was solicited from Records Officers (ROs), Administration Officers (AOs) and Information Technology Officers (ITOs) through closed-ended questionnaires. Qualitative data was concurrently solicited on different dates from the Director of the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), seven NAZ Archivists, an Administration Director and ITO

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