


# The Importance of Qualitative Methods in Mixed Methods Studies

Jacquelynne Anne Boivin, Bridgewater State University, USA

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5763-5707>

## ABSTRACT

This article presents a thorough review of the literature dedicated to learning more about mixed methods research design. Explanatory sequential mixed methods studies and exploratory sequential mixed methods studies are the two types of mixed methods research design models that this article presents in detail. To contextualize different ideas related to research design, the author provides examples of research studies that exemplify different research designs falling within mixed methods. The main objective of this article is to highlight the important role that qualitative research design plays in mixed methods research. Such a presentation of the literature aims to argue that qualitative data substantiates quantitative data as a means to heighten the regard to which qualitative methodology receives.

## KEYWORDS

Case Study, Dissertation, Ethnography, Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods, Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods, Grounded Theory, Phenomenology

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, as qualitative research methods have struggled to gain the level of respect and prowess as quantitative research methods, mixed methodology lacks a substantial amount of guidance in the literature. As a Ph.D. candidate at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA, I desired to conduct a phenomenology for my dissertation, but struggled to structure a strictly-qualitative study in a way that would appease my dissertation committee. I soon learned that many students earning doctorates in the field of Education, and other disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, faced the same struggle. The only way their qualitative data could be justified would be if they had quantitative data to support their qualitative data. This was when I started to investigate mixed methods approaches to research design.

In this article, two options of mixed methods studies are explored. This first is explanatory sequential mixed methods study and the second is exploratory sequential mixed methods study. These two types of mixed methods research can be described a truly symbiotic relationship. The two different portions of each of these research methods provide deeper insight to the other. The qualitative portion informs the quantitative portion, and vice versa. The main objective for supplying such an exploration of mixed methods research is to understand the vastly important role of qualitative methodology within mixed methods. In turn, this discussion dispels the fallacy that the benefit of mixed methods

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is that quantitative data substantiates qualitative data. This article argues that the opposite is true. Mixed methods research is powerful and insightful because it allows qualitative data to substantiate quantitative data. Qualitative methods, in summary, have more value in mixed methods research than quantitative methods.

## **BACKGROUND**

Russell and Gregory (2003) articulated that qualitative research struggles to agree upon consistent expectations in regard to reliability and validity. The inconsistencies within qualitative research methods has contributed to the idea that qualitative research is not as accurate, valid, or reliable as quantitative research methods. This article aims to disrupt this notion by placing heavy emphasis on the value and importance of quantitative research methodology. While some academic scholars may argue that mixed methods research is the only version of qualitative research that is valid and reliable because it has quantitative research methods to substantiate the qualitative data, this article takes the opposite viewpoint. What if qualitative data substantiates quantitative data regardless of the mixed methods approach. While the claims in this article are broad in nature, the generalized perspective allows for researchers of all specializations to reimagine qualitative methodology.

## **MAIN FOCUS OF THE ARTICLE**

This article addresses the importance of qualitative data within mixed methods research and is divided into three main sections: (a) explanatory sequential mixed methods study, (b) exploratory sequential mixed methods study, and (c) the necessity of qualitative methods in mixed methods design. While this article provides insights and recommendations, it evokes questions that warrant explanation.

## **MIXED METHODS RESEARCH**

Mixed methods research is, in summary, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research design. As Maxwell (2016) explained in his article, mixed methods research design occurred in academia well before it had the label of “mixed methods.” Studies that utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative research design have been documented since the 1950s (Maxwell, 2016). Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, and Turner (2007) contented that integrative research, multimethod research, multiple methods, triangulated studies, mixed research, and blended research are a few labels given to mixed methods research. Regardless of the label, mixed methods studies share many commonalities.

Onwuegbuzie et al. (2007) summarized mixed methods research design as consisting of four central domains. The first domain is philosophical perspectives and the second domain is logistics surrounding inquiry. The third domain is procedural guidelines and the fourth is ideas surrounding socio-politics. These four domains were used to create a board definition of mixed methods research. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2007) wrote that mixed methods research is, “an intellectual and practical synthesis based on qualitative and quantitative research; it is the third methodological or research paradigm (along with qualitative and quantitative research” (p. 129). This definition properly reflects ideas by Cameron (2011).

Cameron (2011) wrote that when defining mixed methods research, there are five essential tenets that warrant careful consideration. The Five P’s recognize the controversies and challenges that mixed methods research faces (Cameron, 2011). For each of the P’s, Cameron (2011) cited Bazeley’s (2004) learning objectives for the researcher. The first P stands for “paradigms.” The associated learning objective is that the research must obtain a solid understanding of the paradigms associated with the guiding research questions at hand, while considering the theoretical framework. The second P stands for “pragmatism.” Bazeley’s (2003) learning objective that corresponds to the second P

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