

Problems And Methods Of Enquiry In South Asian History

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The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language "Testing and Assessment" Research: A Literature Review

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Abstract

The researchers of various disciplines often use qualitative and quantitative research methods and approaches for their studies. Some of these researchers like to be known as qualitative researchers; others like to be regarded as quantitative researchers. The researchers, thus, are sharply polarised; and they involve in a competition of pointing out the benefits of their own preferred methods and approaches. But, both the methods and approaches (qualitative and quantitative) have pros and cons. This study, therefore, aims to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative research approaches and methods in language testing and assessment research. There is a focus on ethical considerations too. The study found some strengths of using qualitative methods for language "assessment and testing" research—such as, eliciting deeper insights into designing, administering, and interpreting assessment and testing; and exploring test-takers' behaviour, perceptions, feelings, and understanding. Some weaknesses are, for instance, smaller sample size and time-consuming. Quantitative research methods, on the other hand, involve a larger sample, and do not require relatively a longer time for data collection. Some limitations are that quantitative research methods take snapshots of a phenomenon; not in-depth, and overlook test-takers' and testers' experiences as well as what they mean by something. Among these two research paradigms, the quantitative one is dominant in the context of language testing and assessment research.

Keywords: qualitative and quantitative research, advantages, disadvantages, testing and assessment

1. Introduction

Qualitative and quantitative research approaches and methods are usually found to be utilised rather frequently in different disciplines of education such as sociology, psychology, history, and so on. Concerning the research approaches, there persist so-called paradigm wars in which researchers belong to the two distinct camps—interpretivism and positivism. The positivistic researchers' belief is that the social world consists of concrete and unchangeable reality which can be quantified objectively. Whereas, the interpretive researchers oppose the positivistic belief of reality, and argue that, instead, the reality is socially constructed by the humans which can be changed and understood subjectively (Corbetta, 2003; Marcon & Gopal, 2005; Kroeze, 2012). As focused on the paradigm wars, there are some arguments about the superiority of research methods: Whether qualitative evidence is superior to quantitative evidence, or vice-versa. In this regard, there is a need to highlight the history of the emergence of paradigms in order to understand the dominant method in the arena of research. For the first half of the twentieth century, the positivist model was dominant in social and educational research by giving importance of using standardised tests and systematic observation, experiment, survey data, and statistical analysis. In other words, the quantitative research method was quite powerful. However, after the 1960s, because of the influence of Kuhn's work, the new approaches—such as, symbolic interactionist ethnography, critical research, feminist phenomenology, discourse analysis and other forms—came up into practice (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). That is to say, there was a shift of research methods from quantitative to qualitative, and the superiority of quantitative research was not as powerful as before. The growth of qualitative research was also from the unhappiness with the process of generating knowledge within the positivistic research (Sandberg, 2005). Alongside the research methods and approaches, ethical considerations were also introduced in the research world though it was subsequent to research methods and approaches. Up to

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