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Some Guidance on Conducting and Reporting Qualitative Studies

Peter Twining, Rachelle S. Heller, Miguel Nussbaum, Chin-Chung Tsai

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Some Guidance on Conducting and Reporting Qualitative Studies

Peter Twining *[a], Rachelle S. Heller [b], Miguel Nussbaum [c], Chin-Chung Tsai [d]

[a] Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology, The Open University, UK
[b] The George Washington University, USA
[c] Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile
[d] National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, Taiwan

Abstract

This paper sets out to address the problem of the imbalance between the number of quantitative and qualitative articles published in highly ranked research journals, by providing guidelines for the design, implementation and reporting of qualitative research. Clarification is provided of key terms (such as quantitative and qualitative) and the interrelationships between them. The relative risks and benefits of using guidelines for qualitative research are considered, and the importance of using any such guidelines flexibly is highlighted. The proposed guidelines are based on a synthesis of existing guidelines and syntheses of guidelines from a range of fields.

Keywords: qualitative, quantitative, research, guidelines, theoretical stance

1 Introduction

The quality of research is a key concern globally. This has been reflected in exercises in a number of countries to assess research quality (e.g. The Research Excellence Framework in the UK (http://www.ref.ac.uk/); Excellence in Research in Australia (http://www.arc.gov.au/era-2015)), often using metrics that have favoured 'objectivist' approaches. This has impacted on the nature of the papers being submitted to journals, with few qualitative papers being published in top tier academic journals (Avenier & Thomas, 2015). This imbalance between papers adopting Quantitative and Qualitative approaches is reflected in Computers & Education (Pérez-Sanagustín et al., 2016). We are keen to redress this balance by encouraging the submission of more, high quality, qualitative research.

Research about the pedagogical use of digital technology is interdisciplinary, spanning fields specifically concerned with the design and development of digital technology systems (albeit for use in educational contexts) as well as with teaching across the full range of subject disciplines. Academics from different fields understand and value quantitative and qualitative research differently. This enhances the need for shared understandings about how to judge the quality of qualitative research, whilst recognising these multiple perspectives.

2 What do we mean by qualitative research?

There is much confusion in the literature about terminology related to research, not least in terms of the extent to which you can 'mix and match' between quantitative and qualitative research. Twining's (2010) analysis of the 'quantitative vs qualitative debate' suggests that much of the confusion relates to different 'levels' at which people are considering research. We have extended Twining's framework in Table 1.

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