



Research Article

MIXED METHODS IN LINGUISTICS RESEARCH: A CRITICAL METHODOLOGICAL REVIEW

*Abduh Almashy

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 16th April 2016
Received in revised form
25th May 2016
Accepted 29th June 2016
Published online 31st July 2016

ABSTRACT

This article has identified the concept of mixed method as a research methodology. The main model of mixed method that researchers may employ has been outlined. Furthermore, the paper has shortly discussed the use of mixed methods within linguistics and the drawbacks or limitations that using such methods may have. Finally, the review has concluded with the suitability of mixed methods for the study on the impact of extensive reading activities to develop oral communication in English of Saudi University students.

Keywords:

Linguistics,
Mixed,
Research and Methods.

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INTRODUCTION

Johnson *et al.* (2007: 113) state that mixed methods is 'an approach to knowledge (theory and practice) that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints.' That is, qualitative and quantitative research ideas are included in mixed methods. Campbell and Fiske (1959: 81-105) proposed the idea of triangulation where the results would be validated by using more than one method. That is, results would not be seen as a consequence of a method in particular. The outline to triangulate methods was established by Denzin (1978: 291).

Models of Mixed Methods

Creswell and Plano-Clark (2006: 59) identify four major kinds of mixed methods designs: triangulation, embedded, explanatory, and exploratory. The triangulation design has the purpose to collect complementary data on the same research issue to understand it. This method intends to put together strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methods. It compares and contrasts qualitative findings with statistical results to expand or validate the results. In the embedded design, one set of data supports a primary data type in a study that poses multiple questions.

*Corresponding author: Abduh Almashy,
School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences,
Newcastle University, United Kingdom

As Caracelli and Greene (1997:6) note, each data type will answer parts of the research, and one component of the research may be embedded in the other. This type of design is useful when there is not sufficient time to collect equally extensive quantitative and qualitative data. This makes it more manageable and appealing to funding agencies. The explanatory design has two phases where quantitative data is further explained by qualitative data. As Morse (1991: 120) explains, this design is appropriate for research where qualitative data is needed to explain significant, outlier or surprising results. It is also a useful design if quantitative results want to be followed up with qualitative research or vice versa. Finally, as Greene *et al.* (1989: 269) note, the exploratory design uses the results of the first qualitative method to develop or inform the second quantitative method. This design presupposes that exploration is needed because initial measures may not be attainable, or the variables are not known, or there is no guiding framework. The separate phases are easy to describe and report.

The Use of Mixed Methods in Linguistics Research

We find many authors who advocate the use of mixed-method approaches in linguistics, including Angouri (2010), Salkind (2010) and Hashemi (2012). For instance, Hashemi (2012: 207) states that mixed methods 'is a useful tool for exploring complex systems, investigating both the processes and the outcomes.' The author affirms that choosing the design must fit the research purpose, the research question, and the context.

His final evaluation is that further use of mixed methods within the field of applied linguistics will result in better quality of research within the field.

Values of Mixed Methods in Linguistics Research

Hashemi (2012: 210) draws in several examples of research studies that have produced excellent results thanks to the use of mixed methods; these include Alise and Teddlie (2010: 111), Li and Walsh (2011) and Walsh *et al.* (2011). For example, Hashemi (2012: 210) notes that triangulation designs can be used to offer extra data in multilevel discourse analysis. However, researchers such as Bergman (2008: 2) indicate that linguistics tend to use quasi-mixed designs in that the mixing is only done at the stages of data collection and analysis.

Limitations of Mixed Methods - General and Par

A researcher faces certain challenges when using the triangulation design. As Creswell and Plano-Clark (2006: 66) note, effort and expertise is required as equal weight must be given to each data type. This can be overcome by using a team of specialised researchers. Besides, researchers may encounter disagreement between the qualitative and quantitative results. This will result in an additional collection of data. The problems facing the use of the embedded design include specifying the purpose of collecting more qualitative than quantitative data, or vice versa. Moreover, it may be difficult to integrate the results if the methods answer different questions.

The explanatory design requires time to implement the two phases, and one phase may take longer than the other. Also, the researcher must establish if the same participants need to be used for the two phases. However, it is hard to specify how participants might be selected for the second phase as it depends on initial findings. The limitations of the exploratory design are also time-related, as well as associated with the selection of participants.

The Ethical and Practical Issues Which May Arise by the Use of the Mixed Methods

The example study to discuss can be found in Appendix 1. The success of this project will depend on the adequate design of the research tools as well as how the research is going to be conducted. We must make sure that the methods used to investigate our phenomenon are appropriate to the research questions we posited. We must also bear in mind the effects of having to spread the limited resources we have at hand, as well as the skills and training that we have as researchers. As Hesse-Biber (2010:55) claims, to make sure that the research is valid and accurate, we need to discuss its ethical implications. Before starting a research project, we must consider what ethical issues we may face. For example, whether any ethical issues will come up due to the design of the study or the sampling, etc. In our research, there does not seem to be any ethical issues in that respect. On the other hand, there is a responsibility towards our research participants. It is necessary to obtain their informed consent to participate in our project. It is also important to consider if the guarantee of anonymity is compromised by using mixed methods design. And if that is a possibility, participants should be informed that confidentiality may not be guaranteed.

Once the research has been conducted, it is paramount to consider what ethical issues may come into play to decide which research findings to publish.

Conclusion

To sum up, we have looked into the positive and negative aspects of mixed methods, and we have concluded that the task at hand is challenging not only in its design and execution, but also in that our results may ask for further testing or may come out as inconclusive. We must bear in mind the time restrictions and the abilities that we have as researchers in order to utilise a valid mixed methods design to obtain valid results in our study.

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