

A Study on Choosing Research Methods For English Studies to Fill the Knowledge Gap

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Abstract

Background – Most researchers find it tricky to choose the appropriate research method for English studies to fulfill the given research objective(s) and answer the research questions. Right research methodologies can be selected on the basis of the type of research and it should underpin the methods for data collection and research to be used.

Objective – The objective of this research is to determine the use of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method research designs and to help researchers choose the appropriate research method for the given research topic.

Methodology – This study uses secondary data from the existing sources like research articles, journals, publications, and internet sources to fulfill the research objectives.

Results – Regardless of selected research method, the key here is to choose the suitable data collection techniques that can meet the research objectives.

Keywords: research objectives, research questions, research methods, methodology, English studies, quantitative research, qualitative research, mixed method research

1. Introduction

In almost every field, decision-makers and leaders rely on research results before making big decisions, for example, adjusting seating arrangements to improve employee satisfaction and productivity in office settings, ways to address problems of people who rely on social services, and educational programs that give best results. It is important to know the vital research methods to resolve conflicting concerns in literature and arrive at the right conclusions.

A lot of scholars are expected to do simple and basic research. For example, psychologists track improvements of their clients, social workers gather data about their clients, teachers try different classroom methods, and a lot of businesses use data from the web for market research.

1.1 Background

The research findings are influenced by the way someone investigates. Hence it is important to be clear about research methods, research skills, and research methodologies for a research scholar. Literary research is lacking standards and excellence in India. Despite having a catchy title, it is nothing but a summary of texts. A lot of dissertations even lack research questions. They are either a collection of details on selected texts gathered from secondary resources or a summary of major information sources.

A study must be aimed to improve understanding and knowledge. A lot of research scholars don't use any methodology or research method for conducting English studies. They have no idea what to do except explain what they have found. They are clueless about how to proceed in researching and searching. English studies are more than simply textual analysis. Researchers can use different methods to think divergently. This study will help research scholars in this regard.

1.2 Literature Reviews

Being an academic discipline, English studies are centuries old in the Western world as research methodology or method is a recent concept. On the flip side, research methods in English literature are scientific and objective as they come from social sciences. In Indian

academia, research methodologies and methods are supposed to be irrelevant despite creating great and ground-breaking results. **Jeyaraj** argues that research is guided well by methodologies and research methods are well defined. It is also important to nurture research skills and culture which should be incorporated compulsorily and explicitly in studies. A research student must get training in research techniques and skills for overall growth.

From 2011 to 2013, studies published in an international journal “TESOL Quarterly (TQ)” and national journal “English Teaching (ET)” analyzed existing research trends and suggested future research paths for research topics, participants, target language skills, and research methods. Findings suggest that the participation of university students in both journals was highest as they are easily available to them in higher educational institutions. There was a proper balance between qualitative and quantitative research studies in TQ and over 50% of articles were based on quantitative research in ET, apart from a larger number of studies with mixed-method research (**Ma**).

Due to limitations of both qualitative and quantitative designs, mixed methods research has evolved as a more complex methodology. **Caruth** determines mixed methods research to help those who are less known about the design by using the same in their future research. It is also gaining prominence among academicians and is widely used by researchers as it can provide more robust results. Researchers can easily outline the reasons for using this method. It has been a great alternative to qualitative or quantitative design. It provides great insights into the study phenomenon and enables capturing details that might be missed by only one design and generates more interest and knowledge for further studies that can manage a huge range of questions.

1.3 Research Gap

Research methods are like building blocks for any scientific study. They explain “how” when it comes to developing systematic knowledge. This research is aimed to find the knowledge gap between research topics and how to choose research methods to be used accordingly.

1.4 Research Question

- How to collect unbiased and complete information for the given research question?
- How to choose the appropriate research method for the specific area of study?

1.5 Importance of the Study

This research will help scholars to choose the right research methods as per the given research topics and make wise decisions when it comes to recommend solutions for any specific problem to be discussed.

1.6 Research Objectives

- To help scholars choosing the right research method for the given research topics

1.7 Scope and Limitation

Research is done in almost every field in this day and age. Be it entering a specific field or pursuing academic career, research skills are very important. Application of research methods is very important in academic research. Academic work can be judged based on research methods used and they are always described in academic writing. This research will explain how to collect the information which is unbiased and complete and address the given research question properly. However, further studies need to be done on this topic to expand the area of knowledge for researchers and academic scholars.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Method & Design

In order to fulfill the above research objectives, secondary research of PhD dissertations, research journals, articles, and other sources available in online journals and databases has been conducted. Relevant information has been found to fulfill the objectives of this research.

2.2 Research Approach

Data from national and international journals and internet sources has been collected and analyzed. These research journals usually cover English learning and teaching.

2.3 Analysis of Study

In the beginning of 21st century, mostly quantitative research was done. In the 1970s, qualitative design was developed, especially objectifying the hegemony of convention of qualitative research (Lund). Until recently, qualitative and quantitative research designs have been used in academic research individually from one another. A lot of debates have been made between qualitative and quantitative approaches. These debates have constantly been contentious. Qualitative researchers have been considered “hermeneutists” and quantitative researchers are known as “positivists”.

In addition, quantitative researchers always claimed that it was not easy to interpret, duplicate, and generalize qualitative research. Otherwise, shallow descriptions and immaterial hypotheses have been used by qualitative researchers. Quantitative research proposes hypothesis which can be refuted or accepted and qualitative research produces a hypothesis (Cronholm, & Hjalmarsson). It is usually accepted that a lot of understanding is needed from the study of qualitative research as compared to quantitative research. In addition, quantitative research can obtain better generalizability and objectivity.

Question 1 How to collect unbiased and complete information for the given research question?

Research methods are known to be the building blocks in a scientific business. When it comes to developing systematic knowledge, they are considered as “how”. Considering “knowledge”, one way someone knows things is with their own experiences. But there is a limited scope of personal experiences, no matter how rich in detail and depth they are and how much they make life easier. One can easily arrive at misleading conclusions for all and over generalize things if they get to generalize what is right for them.

The Authority of teachers, parents, shows they watch, books they read, articles, and news from social media, etc. are the next basic ways to achieve knowledge. There are different sources

of “secondhand” knowledge and this knowledge usually is a step removed from their origin. Life can be made easier by gaining knowledge from a vast collection of humanity, rather than depending only on what can be discovered. Many people attain a fundamental set of knowledge that is relevant for working and living in the modern world by spending years at school. Even a small part of the knowledge available can take several years to learn. It is up to the efficiency to learn a lot of skills that can benefit us to keep building and further our collective knowledge.

However, all the information is not equally valuable that passes along. Some things learned on others’ authority rely on scientific research. There is obviously a lot of information based only on commonsense, opinion, skewed detailing, and misinterpretation. These things can be sorted with critical thinking skills. One can expand their ability to think with knowledge and acquire knowledge by learning with research, practicing research, and reading research samples. When learning rules on the basis of research, one can generate knowledge by practicing and following the science.

No matter what research method is selected, the research methods based on social science are known to be more systematic and they can also reduce biases. The key here is to come up with findings representing reality and dealing with some hidden biases dealing with conclusions that are not based on systematic opinions. The research consists of documenting both results and decisions and making a lot of wise decisions. Decisions mean a lot along the practice of research and they are aimed to be helpful to gather evidence inclusive of the whole spectrum of the phenomenon in the study to keep track of logical sets of rules and to account for possible biased sources. It is very important to learn research methods to make decisions and see things.

Research is done in every domain these days. Be it in an academic career or any applied field, research skills are very important and valuable. The application is common in academic research. Research methods have always been described in academic writing as it is judged on the basis of methods. It is important to support findings on the basis of the collection of information and whether it was unbiased or thorough and address the question properly. A lot of careers out of academia need people to know the data and find ways to gather information and feedback, to find out the meaning of responses through analysis, and to collect information.

Question 2 How to choose the appropriate research method for the specific area of study?

When writing thesis, report, or dissertation, doing research is usually the foundation stone. It is very important to choose the right research methodology to determine the quality and success of any report. Hence, it is vital to get the initial stage right for the research. Qualitative and quantitative are generally two approaches to gather data.

Quantitative Research – Collected data is usually expressed in the form of graphs and numbers to confirm assumptions and theories. Collected data is a kind of factual evidence on the given research topic. It is possible to collect factual evidence in different ways as per the quantitative research method.

- Surveys – It includes a list of questions through ratings or multiple-choice type of questions asked either over phone, personally, or online. Before mentioning the research findings in the form, researchers can provide information like where and when they have done the survey, response rate, and how much time it took to gather response for the questions etc. In addition, they can add a list of questionnaires in the form of appendix to help readers to find out what data was gathered actually.
- Secondary data – This information can be collected from existing sources like archival data or publications for the analysis. The researcher has to mention exactly where they got the data from, what criteria they used to choose the data, and how the information was produced initially after entering the data in a report.
- Content Analysis – This way, certain words or texts are recorded to determine communication patterns systematically.
- Observations – People are observed in their usual environment where researchers cannot control the variables.
- Experiments – Researchers conduct a test in a controlled setting to gather the data. They can use the data for an environment where they can manipulate and control the variables for cause-and-effect relationships. They can include the whole information in the report to design within-subject or between-subject experiment, techniques, procedures, and tools they used for the test.

Researchers can add information in quantitative research on –

- Software for data analysis used (SPSS, Statistics, etc.)
- How they prepared the data
- Regression analysis or any statistical methods they used

For example, when it comes to survey around 200 or 300 students or any number of students in a university, researcher may ask question like “How satisfied are you with your teachers on a scale of 1 to 5?” With a statistical analysis, they may find out a result that students rated their teachers 3.3 or 4.5 on average.

Qualitative Research – This method is helpful to describe concepts, thoughts, or experiences of people through focus groups, interviews, discourse analysis, case studies, and literature research. This survey is basically done to gather experience and thoughts of people. Here are some of the techniques used in qualitative research –

- **Case Studies** – A detailed study of an organization, event, a group or an individual is known as a case study. In this study, researcher has to explain how they chose their study materials like images or texts for analysis, how they selected and collected evidence, and types of materials analyzed.
- **Literature Review** – It is basically the review paper which discusses the works done by other authors.
- **Focus Groups** – Opinions are gathered from public discussing a topic with a group of people.
- **Interviews** – This method consists of open-ended questions asked to the respondents verbally. It is used to describe where, when, and how interviews were done. It consists of details on how researcher has selected and found the participants –
 - How many respondents were participated?
 - What kinds of discussions were done (semi-structured, structured, unstructured)
 - How conversations were recorded (note-taking or audiovisuals)

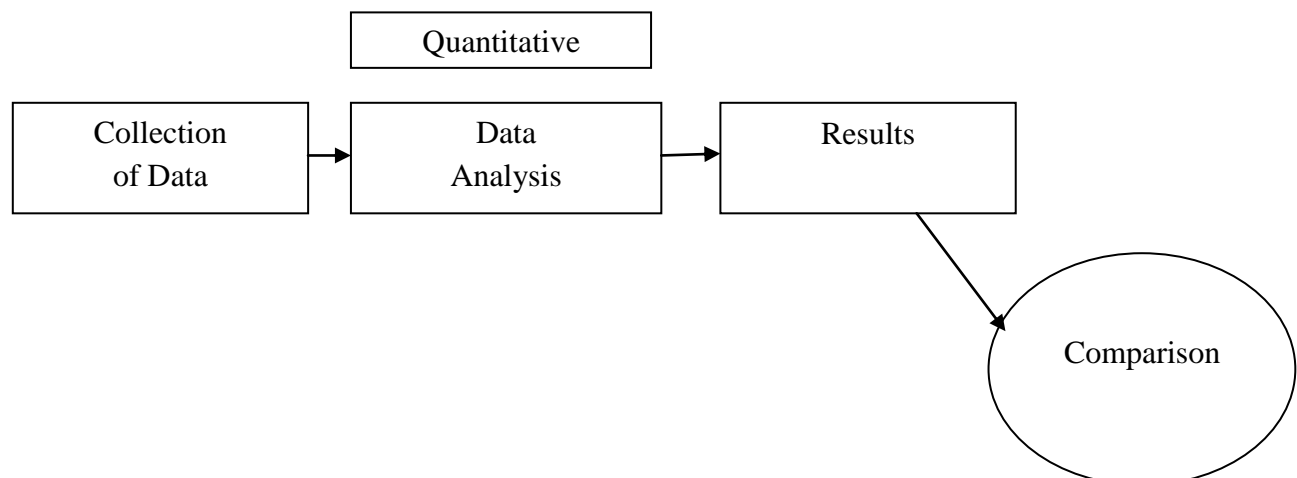
- How much time did interview take?
- How researchers have accessed participants?
- What community or group they have observed?

The analyses are usually based on language, image, and observations in qualitative research (usually having textual analysis). Some of the specific methods are also used like –

- Thematic analysis – Determining data to know patterns and broad terms and coding.
- Content analysis – Categorizing and discussing the sense of words, sentences, and phrases.
- Discourse analysis – Studying the purpose about social context and communication.

One example of a qualitative research is an in-depth interview of say 30 students by asking them with questions like “What according to you can be done to improve the program” or “What do you like about study program?” etc. Researcher may transcribe all the interviews as per the answers with transcription software and find patterns and common links in the responses.

Mixed Methods – It combines both quantitative and qualitative data, i.e. numerical measurement and detailed exploration. For example, a researcher interviews students to know the satisfaction level of students with their programs and find out their responses for new insights. Later, they can conduct a survey to test those details on a wider scale. They can also conduct a survey to determine beliefs, opinions, or trends, along with interviews to know the causes of trends.



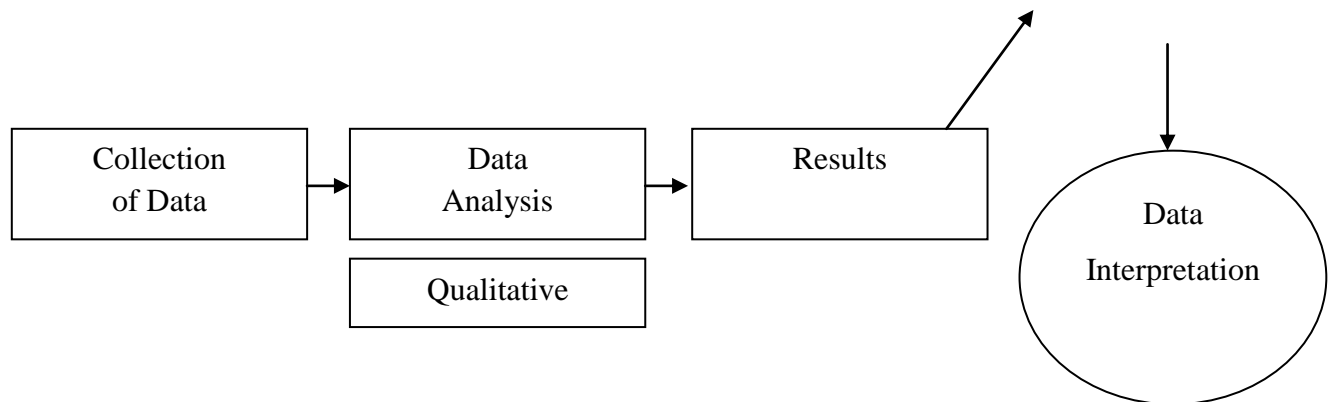


Figure 1 – Mixed Method Research Design

Quantitative vs Qualitative Research

There are different ways both of these methods use to collect data and researchers can answer various types of questions for their research –

Quantitative	Qualitative
Tests hypotheses and theories of research	Explores concepts and formulates a hypothesis or theory
Statistical and mathematical analysis is used to analyze this.	Categorizing, summarizing, and interpreting analysis.
Many respondents are required.	Few respondents are required.
Expressed usually in graphs, numbers, and tables.	Expressed in words.
Multiple-choice types questions are asked in surveys	Open-ended questions are asked in surveys.
Multiple sampling is used.	Theoretical sampling is used.

When to use which method?

Here are some general rules to choose the appropriate method –

- Quantitative method is ideal to test or confirm any hypothesis or theory.
- Qualitative research is ideal to understand some thoughts, concepts, or experiences.

One can choose between mixed methods, quantitative or qualitative methods for the topics of the research. Along with other factors, the choice of research method depends on whether researcher is taking a deductive or inductive approach, whether they are conducting descriptive, experimental, or correlational research, their research question (s), and other factors like time, data availability, and funds.

Data Analysis

Combined data can be analyzed with statistical analysis to discover commonalties or patterns of the data after gathering evidence with quantitative approach. It is possible to report the results in tables and graphs. Software like SAS, SPSS, or Excel can be useful to gather details like –

- Reliability of results
- Average score
- Correlation between multiple variables
- Number of times answer is given

Qualitative data is more difficult to analyze as compared to quantitative data and it includes text, images, or videos rather than numbers. Here are some of the conventional approaches for qualitative data analysis –

- Thematic – Data is examined closely to determine main patterns.
- Qualitative analysis – This content analysis is done to track frequency, position, and meaning of phrases or words
- Discourse – This type of analysis determines the way communication works in social contexts.

3. Results and Conclusion

This study discussed some of the most commonly used research methods and procedures for English studies to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions. It discusses when to use quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method research. Quantitative research

has always been based on statistical analysis, deductive reasoning, and testing hypothesis and qualitative research relies on generating hypothesis and inductive reasoning. Using both methods can be helpful to conduct a detailed research study of the concept which is being investigated.

3.1 Results

In different sectors and fields of the job market, for example, people need to know who is using their services or products, how well they are conducting market or internal objectives, who are communicating with their website, how well their staff is doing, etc. One can become a specialist and gain expertise in research to answer such types of questions. Even gathering some details about research principles can be helpful to make meaningful and smart contributions. It is very vital to know research methods to empower people in their lives as it can make a consumer more critical and wiser. One can make better questions related to the information they come across and, in the end, act as a well-informed decision-maker (Patten & Newhart).

Gathering knowledge with research is a collective approach by nature. There is evidence that may amend, refute, support, or deepen the knowledge with each study. No matter how attractive research studies are, there is rarely proper evidence to consider findings as “hard facts”. Studies may find out what questions are asked by various groups in different ways with the ability to look for relevant findings around the studies and theories can grow as working knowledge. Scientific knowledge is a real conversation to realize what we know to change and grow over time with new inquiries and studies like language.

3.2 Future Scope

Researchers usually associate qualitative study with small samples and quantitative study with large samples. But research questions, research objectives, and design of the research should be the determining factors for the size of the sample. Questionnaires have always been considered as convenient option to gather information quickly from a huge set of population. They are also most beneficial with interviews and other techniques of data collection.

3.3 Suggestions

One thing that is worth noting is that researcher doesn't have to describe their methods only, but to define why and how they applied the method and that their research was conducted

completely. They must convince the readers about their decisions to choose either quantitative or qualitative methods or how they can fulfill their research objective. They should have clear approach to answer the problem statement and research question. The decision of choosing research method should always be in line with the main purpose of research.

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