

What paradigms, methodological approaches, designs, and methods might be applicable to data gathering while conducting research in a complex work-based setting and why? How are ethics and insider research relevant to research in complex work-based settings?

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Introduction

Research has been defined as the collection, analysis and interpretation of data through methodical examination which leads to the solution of a problem (Burns, 2000; Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). This assignment aims to facilitate the development of critical awareness of the key issues in undertaking research in work-based settings. To achieve this, I will examine a range of research paradigms, methodological approaches, designs, and methods. Post-positivist, pragmatist, and feminist paradigms will be explored to exemplify a clear understanding of the range of philosophies generally encountered in research. Corroborating this discussion will be definitions of axiology, ontology and epistemology, which underpin research philosophy and the paradigm (Brown and Dueñas, 2020). This will lead to the consideration of methodological approaches. I will focus on the quantitative approach where the goals are objectivity, replicability, generalisability, and prediction and the qualitative approach where the goals are discovering and understanding experiences, perspectives and beliefs leading to meaning or reality (Harwell, 2011, pp.148-149). The mixed methods approach, which can be defined as research which combines qualitative and quantitative approaches for collecting and analysing data (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007; Doyle, Brady and Byrne, 2009) will be omitted because of the confines of this assignment rather than inequality with the other methodological approaches. Following this will be an inquiry, focussing on the qualitative approach, into the following research designs: action research, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. I have selected these as a cross section of available designs because they engage with phenomena and experience which could be useful in my future research which is likely to involve an examination of the musical skills of triple threat actors. A selection of research methods including Likert scales, interviews, and observations will be discussed, compared, and contrasted to analyse efficacy and weaknesses. Ethics, which is essential to research (Carpenter *et al.*, 2020), will be defined and surveyed with specific consideration of insider research concerns. Insider research will be examined and discussed as a pertinent element of work-based research (Teusner, 2016). Finally, I will conclude with how the exploration and scrutiny of research paradigms, methodological approaches, designs, and methods have increased my knowledge and awareness of research and how I might conduct research which could be applied in my voice studio.

Paradigms

Before discussing methodological approaches, it is important to interrogate how a researcher comes to the decision that a specific approach is needed. The paradigm is the portal into a specific methodological approach. The Research Onion (Appendix I) is a

representation of the entire research process and a helpful tool for novice researchers (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). A researcher begins with the outer layer, the paradigm, and moves through the onion to the centre making decisions along the way according to the research being conducted (Kankam, 2019). The paradigm is the evolution of belief systems and suppositions about the evolution of knowledge (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). It considers the progression which researchers follow when generating a new or different understanding within a specific research discipline (Biedenbach and Jacobsson, 2016). Brown and Dueñas (2020) state that it is important to scrutinise the components which make up the paradigm to choose which is right for the research in question while Holmes (2020) emphasises their importance to a researcher's positionality or worldview. These components, which consist of philosophical assumptions (Mertens, 2014; Brown and Dueñas, 2020) are:

- axiology – what holds value and truth?
- ontology – what is the essence of reality?
- epistemology – what is knowledge?

(Chilisa and Kawulich, 2012, p.51; Scott, 2024).

When considering research subjects for the practitioner-researcher vocal pedagogue, these components are essential to defining the voice as self with a throughline to and impact on voice as an instrument (Scott, 2024). For this assignment, I will expand on three paradigms: post-positivism, pragmatism, and feminism.

Post-positivism

Post-positivism is a viable substitute for the conventional positivist framework in the realm of structured research (Kankam, 2019). They share an epistemology and an ontology, therefore, post-positivism is associated with the rigour of the scientific method in a reality which is fixed (Creswell, 2014; Pretorius, 2024). However, they diverge on axiology where post-positivists believe that total objectivity does not exist and reality requires nuanced thought (Pretorius, 2024). Post-positivism is not a replacement for positivism, rather it offers a paradigm which allows an extension into a mixed methods approach because it is more flexible (Henderson, 2011). Even further extending the paradigm, Syed and Mclean (2022) believe that a qualitative approach is also available to the post-positivist because qualitative methods can be used to test hypotheses. The post-positivist voice researcher who is interested in voice and psychology, for example, would have choices regarding methodological approach because interpreting results would be based on their values (Pretorius, 2024).

Pragmatism

The fundamental tenet of pragmatism is that the methodological approach should suit the research question, or in other words, the most important axiological, ontological and epistemological aspect of a study is the research question (Kankam, 2019; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Pragmatism accepts the idea that reality can be singular or multitudinous, is open to empirical interrogation, and positions itself as practical and problem solving in the real world (Dewey, 1929; Rorty, 1999; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Feilzer, 2010). Although post-positivism and pragmatism may seem oppositional, pragmatism is flexible and changes depending on the research question so it can overlap or diverge from post-positivist's axiology and epistemology (Pretorius, 2024). Likewise, Henderson (2011) and Kankam (2019) posit that they are linked by ontology where the belief is to use what works for the research. This suggests that paradigms are non-linear because they can share one or more elements. For the researcher who is interested in somatic modalities or acting through song, the pragmatic paradigm could be a robust choice because it is malleable and would allow for the evolving nature of those subjects.

Feminism

The paradigm can be defined as a research philosophy which aims to counteract the oppression of women (Edwards, 2012). The definition of 'women' or gender is often referenced when discussing feminism which I acknowledge as an important concern for inclusivity but will omit the debate at this time for brevity. To generate a feminist point of view, it is imperative for the researcher to uncover injustices and exploitation of women and to recognise the value of their creations which were never recognised by their oppressors (Saarinen, 1988). As it has evolved, Leavy and Harris (2019, p.12) assert that, "Feminist scholarship is no longer defined only as research that concerns itself with gender, but a component of all scholarship concerned with social change and its real-world applications." I contend that the feminist paradigm could be applied to most research subjects in vocal pedagogy but would probably intersect with or include other paradigms.

Methodological Approaches

This discussion will cover quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches. It is important for the researcher to make a choice and be clear which methodological approach follows the path of the research question which allows for rigour and clarity (O'Leary, 2004).

Quantitative

Quantitative research is a methodological approach which tests objective hypotheses by measuring and analysing data using statistical procedures allowing the researcher to examine variables and their relationship (Creswell, 2014). Lim, Kumar and Ali (2022, p, 485) and Lim (2024b, p. 2) assert that quantitative research can be understood through four analytical perspectives: “necessity, importance, relevance, and urgency” (Appendix II). Objectivity, with a commitment to impartiality and detachment, is another precept of quantitative research which can serve to reduce biases and provide universal results (Lim, 2024b) though as a novice researcher with an interest in post-positivism, it seems that objectivity and bias will always be present. I do not anticipate that my research will skew toward a quantitative approach because my interests lie in subjects which require an assessment of feelings and experiences rather than proving hypotheses through statistical analysis.

Qualitative

The aim of qualitative research is to fully engage with the participants’ lived experience and its qualities (Willig, 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2021; Forbes, 2024). Lim (2024a) professes that qualitative approaches have developed as essential tools for obtaining profound insights and for comprehending intricate phenomena. Whereas the quantitative approach is based in objectivity (Lim, 2024a), the qualitative approach is subjective, using words and images to coalesce themes (O’Leary, 2004; Scott, 2024). Bogden and Biklen (1998) have identified five traits of qualitative research: naturalistic, descriptive data, concern with process, inductive, and meaning. At first, to me, a novice researcher, these descriptors do not seem ‘scientific’ enough which leads to the 70-year-old debate that the quantitative approach is superior to the qualitative approach (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). Devers, (1999) and Lim (2024a) are adamant that absence of rigour or inferiority of the qualitative approach is a fallacy because its soundness lies in a systematic methodology rather than in statistical verification. Taking the voice-practitioner research into consideration, there has been a rigour-relevance divide which has favoured the scientific method over what are considered practitioner texts, despite their expertise (Winter, 2021). However, this is changing as more researchers fuse the disconnect between science and voice pedagogy (Forbes, 2024). As McCoy (2019, p.528) asserts “there are aspects of how we sing on a practical, expressive level that transcend quantitative analysis.” This move toward a more qualitative approach to voice research which is both rigorous and subjective is a positive development for voice pedagogy because it allows for experienced practitioner knowledge to be codified through methodology.

Research Design

In qualitative research, research designs provide the toolkit for researchers to acquire data which reflects human phenomena, experiences, and viewpoints (Lim, 2024a). Willig (2013) proposes four fundamentals of research design:

- naturalistic data – data that is comprehensive not parsed.
- validity – does the data answer the research question?
- reliability – can the data be duplicated at different times?
- representativeness – are the participants representative of the population being examined?

These fundamentals will influence a researcher's choices throughout the research process. I will compare and contrast three qualitative design methodologies: action research, phenomenology, and hermeneutics.

Action Research

Action research, commonly used in the field of education, is an inquiry-based methodology which employs a process of “planning, reflection, action, and monitoring” (Oram, 2015, p.18). Historically, action research is often connected to Ernie Stringer, an influential scholar (Dustman, Kohan and Stringer, 2014) and to Kurt Lewin who believed the nature of this methodology is cyclical, dynamic, and collaborative (Hine, 2013). The inquiry is collective and the participants are studied in social situations to observe their practices (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.569; Winter, 2020). It can have a political agenda because of its lean toward social justice and enhancing lives (Hine, 2013; Winter, 2020). There are downsides to this methodology which can be limiting. The cyclical tenet of the methodology is time-consuming and could affect participation if the research takes too long (Macdonald, 2012). More problematically, there is a credibility issue within the academic community which plagues action research which places academia in opposition to practitioner rendering practitioner research as inferior (MacLean, MacIntosh and Grant, 2002; Klocker, 2012; Oram, 2015; Winter, 2021). In researching this subject, however, there is a wealth of literature which suggests that action research is becoming more mainstream. Many voice practitioner-researchers are also teachers so action research could be an attractive methodology and its focus on the collective might appeal to research in the classroom, with choirs, or with theatrical casts.

Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

While phenomenology and hermeneutics are distinct research designs, they are often paired because they both interrogate experience. While phenomenology is the nature of phenomena as they relate to consciousness, hermeneutics focuses on what it means to be human in the world through experience (Lavery, 2003). When strictly applied to research, the practitioner-researcher can exploit the subtleties of the two methodologies. In phenomenology, the researcher identifies a phenomenon and then gathers data from people who have experienced the phenomenon and reports a holistic description of the quality of the experience for all of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell et al., 2007). At all times during this process, the researcher must perform bracketing which removes their own experiences from the process (Winter, 2020). Hermeneutics analyses text and context using the hermeneutic circle (Appendix III) cycling between the parts and the whole with *Verstehen*, interpretation and understanding, as its foundation (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). The end of the cycling occurs when the researcher has reached a place of meaning without contradictions (Lavery, 2003). It is imperative that the researcher use reflexivity, on which I will expand when discussing insider research, to be part of the homogenous reality of hermeneutics (Lim, 2024a). Each of these methodologies also have downsides which include trustworthiness, time-consumption and bias caused by the subjective nature of both designs (Lim, 2024a). As a practitioner-researcher, I am drawn to these methodologies because of my interest in the singer as athlete and somatic modalities, that is studying phenomena and experience. While this research has highlighted the pitfalls of using these methodologies in the voice world, awareness of the potential downsides and how to counteract them has convinced me of their merit when researching the soma.

Research Methods

Research methods are systematic processes for data collection. Lim (2024a) states that data collection and participant selection are strategic and if the researcher uses diverse sampling and reflexivity, a vigorous exploration of the research question can ensue. Like every decision in the research process, choosing a method is not based on preference, but whether the method is fit for purpose within the research design (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). I have selected three qualitative methods to compare and contrast because they might fit my future research, however, I am aware that the research design leads to the choice, so I may be compelled to use alternative methods.

Likert Scales

The Likert scale is “the attitude measurement constructed from the sum of Likert-type responses on related questions” (Batterton and Hale, 2017, p.33). Likert (1932) measured elemental attitudes using the summation of responses to those questions. When built correctly, the data resembles interval data and can be parsed using traditional methods (Carifio and Perla, 2008; Boone Jr. and Boone, 2021; Batterton and Hale, 2017). A debate on properly constructed scales and ensuing data shows up in much of the literature about Likert scales but I will omit that discussion for succinctness. Limitations for the use of Likert scales include but are not limited to: inference, subjectivity, response truthfulness, and data type (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). While Likert scales measure data which seems designed for a quantitative approach, they are still useful for a voice practitioner-researcher using a mixed methods approach, especially for those interested in the intersections of singing with health and psychology.

Interviews

The interview is a form of dialogue where the researcher wants to know the subject’s opinion on a specific topic (Adhabi and Anozie, 2017). Edwards and Holland (2013) explain the three types of interviews:

- structured – quantitative: data driven
- semi-structured – qualitative: partially flexible
- unstructured – qualitative: completely flexible

Adhabi and Anozie (2017) posit that semi-structured interviews are the optimal data collection method for qualitative research. If a qualitative researcher’s goal is to understand particular rather than general perspectives, then semi-structured interviews are the preferred method (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). Winter (2020) situates this concept in voice pedagogy saying that practitioner-researchers may use semi-structured or unstructured interviews to gain an understanding of experience. For example, if trying to understand the full extent of a triple threat’s musical training and its effects on learning and performance, interviews would provide nuance that a survey would not. Some issues encountered in semi-structured interviews are objectivity, bias, and power dynamics which can be remediated with planning and awareness (Adams 2010).

Observation

In broadest terms, the definition of observation is “the need to study and understand people in their natural environment” (Baker, 2006, p.173). The main types of observations in qualitative research are:

- Non-participant – observes participants without taking part.
- Participant – engages in everyday events in a natural environment.
- Covert – without agreement from the subject(s).
- Overt – with agreement from the subject(s).

(Jibril, 2018)

Observation’s unique asset is that the data it produces is potentially more legitimate and reliable than other methods which rely on mediation or inference (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The Hawthorne effect, where participants change their behaviour while being observed is the main downside of observation (French, 1953, p.101; Lim 2024a). For the voice practitioner-researcher, Winter (2021) suggests that observation is ideally suited to study the subtle inter-personal relationships formed in the singing studio.

Ethics

The word ‘ethics’ is derived from the Greek *ēthos* which means moral character (‘Ethos’, 2025). Graham (2001, p.1) says that ethics are “about right and wrong, and about good and bad in human life.” Essentially, ethics represents a framework of moral values that influence individuals’ choices and lifestyles and focuses on what benefits both people and the community (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2014). Research affects both the individual and the community, therefore, great care should be taken with regards to proceeding ethically during every step of the process. A practitioner-researcher has definitive resources for ethical behaviour because national and international organisations have codified ethics in research through sets of principles. The Belmont Principles (1978) were originally devised for biomedical research and then were widely adopted as the basic principles for all research. They are:

- Respect for persons and their autonomy
- Beneficence
- Non-maleficence
- Distributive justice ensuring benefits and burdens are shared equitably

(Beauchamp and Childress, 1994; United States Department of Health and Human Services 2018). The Singapore Statement (2010), which was published by the World Conferences on Research Integrity, sets out an amalgam of good practice targeting researchers and their

institutions worldwide. Their principals, which apply directly to the treatment and care of research subjects, are:

- Honesty in all aspects of research
- Accountability in the conduct of research
- Professional courtesy and fairness in working with others
- Good stewardship of research on behalf of others

(World Conferences on Research Integrity, 2010, para 2). The UK Research Integrity Office adopted both sets of principles as benchmarks for researchers in the UK (Carpenter et al., 2020).

Ethics is a way of being, but the researcher needs to take pragmatic steps to implement an ethical framework around their work. The subjects need to be considered with care and attention. Informed consent, where participants are fully informed of risks and outcomes, differs from consent, which is merely agreement to do something (Baig and Khan, 2023). O'Leary (2004) furthers the idea of informed consent adding debriefing, the right to withdraw, and lack of coercion or inducement to the definition. Informed consent is non-negotiable and would be a serious ethical breach if not applied. Any information collected by the researcher should be confidential and anonymous, that is untraceable to the subject who provided it, including their identity (Denscombe, 2002; O'Leary, 2004). From my previous experience in data privacy, data retention and disposal should occur according to local laws and guidelines. There are also risks for the practitioner-researcher such as physical and emotional harm (Bloor, Fincham and Sampson, 2010; Silverio *et al.*, 2022) or false accusations of misconduct (Marusic and Roje, 2023, p.129). Risk assessments will ensure a safe environment for both researcher and participants during the research process (Lim, 2024a). As a voice teacher who works with children and is well-versed in safeguarding measures, the ethical guidelines for research are akin to what I practice in my studio. However, Lindkvist, Koppel and Tinghög (2024) found that researchers rate themselves and their colleagues as more ethical than they actually are and that this bounded ethicality could lead to suspicious practices in research. Bounded ethicality or inconsistent ethical behaviour is important to consider as a novice practitioner-researcher.

Insider Research

At its core, insider research is research conducted by a representative of the group, culture or organisation which is being studied and is compatible with many disciplines (Greene, 2014).

Costley and Armsby (2007) and Lester and Costley (2010) characterise insider research as a cross-disciplinary area that transcends conventional academic categories and is governed by its distinct principles and practices. Ragan and Maxfield (2021) demonstrate that vocal pedagogy is both cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary (Appendix IV), so its development fits the definition of insider research. Labaree (2002) considers a set of simultaneous benefits and challenges which should be considered by practitioner-researchers: common experience, accessibility, shared culture, and intrinsic knowledge. When I teach a voice lesson, these four axioms always apply, so if I were to use my students as research subjects, I become a practitioner-researcher where these axioms take on a greater significance. For example, I have the common experience of taking voice lessons, but is my experience the same as my students? Would the variables of the experience such as teacher, age, or musical style render my experience as very different from that of my students?

In answer to my questions, Mercer (2007) describes two sets of variables which affect the positionality or worldview of an insider researcher which she describes as a continuum:

Innate Features	Dynamic Features
gender	time and place
ethnicity	power dynamics
sexual orientation	personality
age (evolving)	topic

The effects of positionality on the entire research process are profound because positionality accepts and understands that researchers are integral to the social context they examine (Holmes, 2020). However, the challenges of insider research and positionality could negatively affect ethics and outcomes (Labaree, 2002; Mercer, 2007). To counteract this, a researcher should employ reflexivity which forms positionality (Holmes, 2020). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) define reflexivity as a reflective practice where researchers attempt to understand their relationship to and influence on their own body of work. When discussing voice pedagogy research, Forbes (2024) concludes that subjectivity is as an asset, but the researcher must use reflexivity to avoid blind spots when it comes to the data. Braun and Clark (2013) go a step further saying that reflexivity is imperative to recognise unintentional bias. All the ethical pitfalls outlined in the previous section apply to insider research, but they are intensified by positionality and proximity. Specific to insider research two areas for caution are debriefing, subjects should be fully aware of and consent to the data gathering process, and confidentiality, only data gathered within the context of the research should be used, rather than anything overheard incidentally (Mercer, 2007; Scott, 2024). From this research I have elucidated that self-awareness, common sense, courtesy,

and ethicality underpin insider research. As a practitioner-researcher, I apply these principles in my voice studio so I can transfer them to my future research. This will include treating my participants with consideration, following all ethical guidelines, and using reflexivity to recognise positionality and to mitigate bias.

Conclusion

At the outset of this assignment, I stated that my aim was to develop a critical awareness of the key issues in undertaking research in work-based settings. Using the research onion (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019), I was able to move through the entire research process with a visual cue where there is an elegant order and a flow. One of the most important things that I learned as I investigated the process from paradigm to approach to design to data collection was that the choices made for all the layers of the onion follow the research and subject in this particular approach (O'Leary, 2004). A robust research question will dictate the choices we make as practitioner-researchers (Brown and Dueñas, 2020). The application of an ethical framework to every part of the research process is crucial for validity and trustworthiness. The principles for ethics in research are clear and resolute and should be applied with great care. Insider research has its own principles and practices (Lester and Costley, 2010) within a qualitative approach and these distinctions are important for a practitioner researcher to understand and to follow. Positionality, reflexivity and ethics are archetypes of the practices of insider research. Ultimately, I am a singer, a singing teacher, and music director who is interested in learning more about how, why, and with whom I work. Singers are very good at uncovering truths which others may not see thus voice practitioner researchers should champion qualitative research and its intrinsic values (Forbes, 2024). Throughout this assignment, I have referred to myself as a novice practitioner-researcher in vocal pedagogy. Everything that I have learned through this assignment has been new but never surprising. A cogent comprehension of the research process will allow my future research to be compelling, valuable and meaningful.

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Appendices

Appendix I

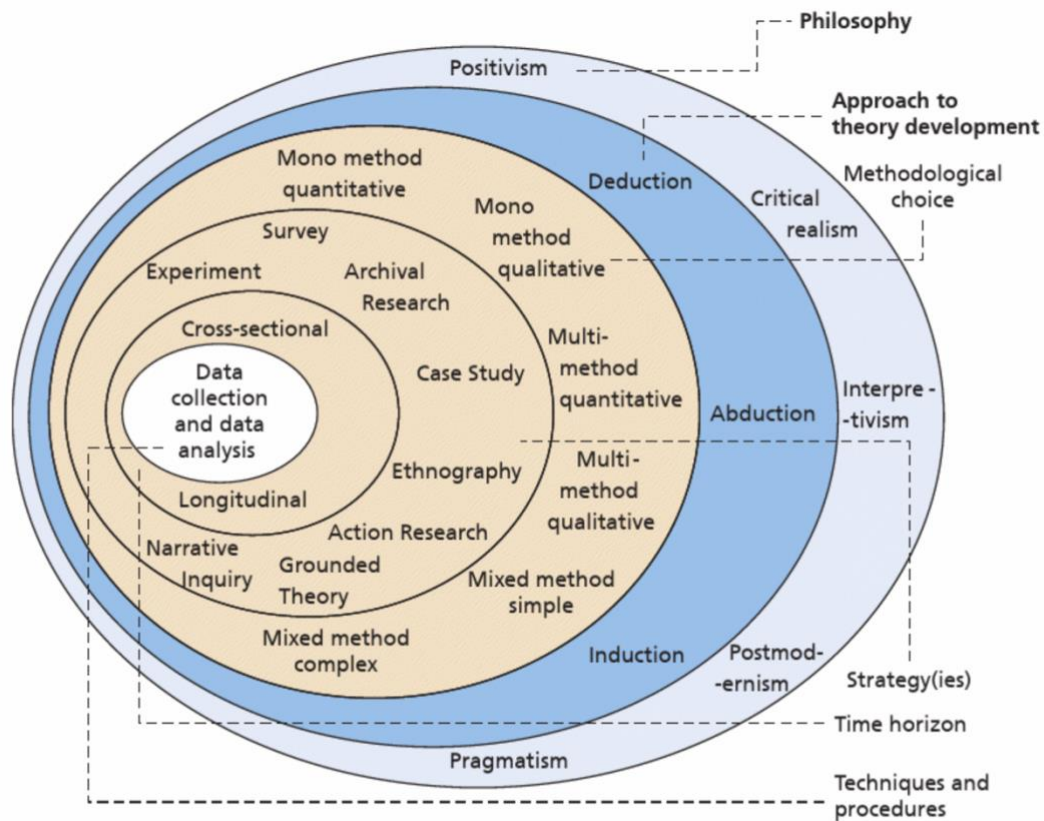


Figure 4.1 The 'research onion'

Source: ©2018 Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill

(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019)

Appendix II

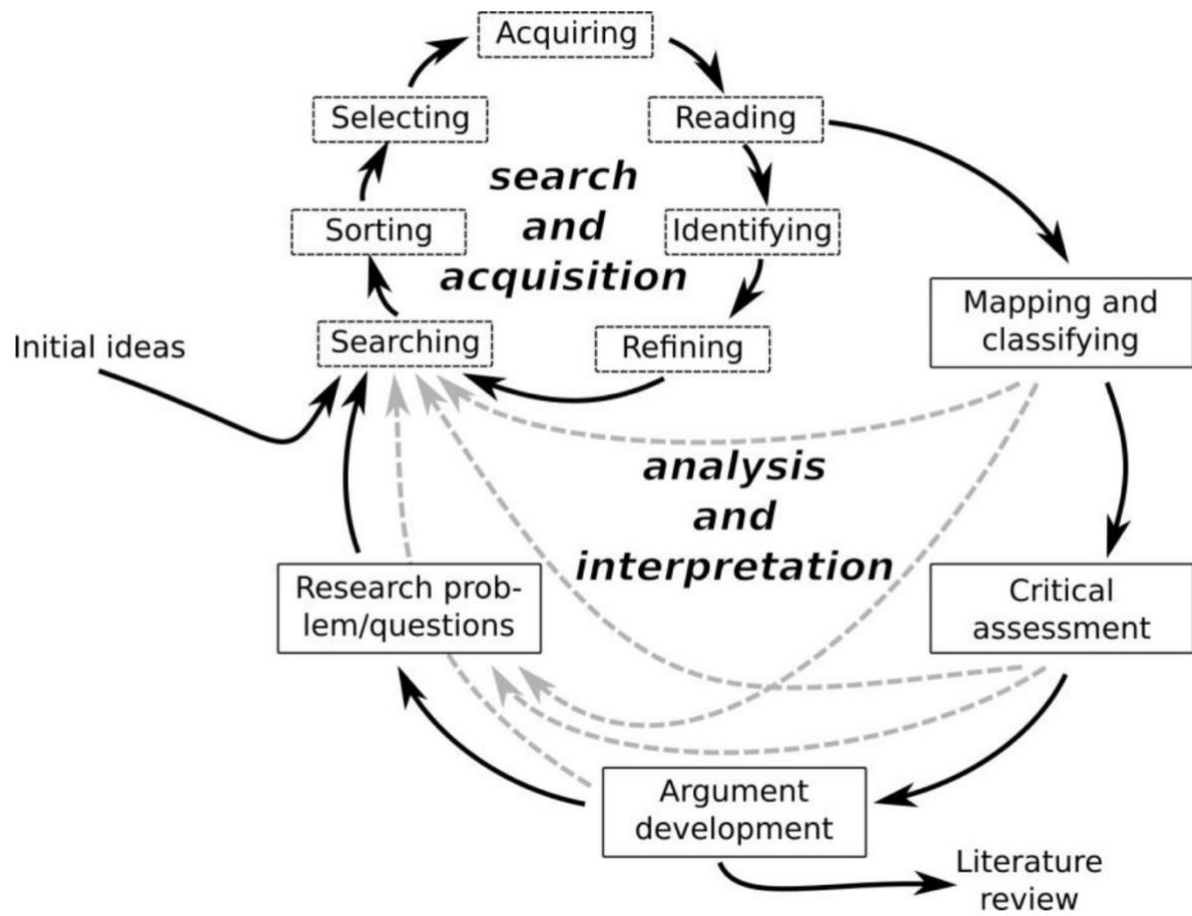
Table I. Motivation of Quantitative Research.

Aspect	Description	Implication
Necessity	Lack of empirical rigor in research leads to diminished academic credibility and real-world applicability.	Impedes progress in academic research, industry applications, and public policy.
Importance	Enables extraction of patterns (descriptive), problems (diagnostic), predictions (predictive), and prescriptions (prescriptive)—collectively, the 4Ps of data analysis.	Enriches discourse and strategy that withstand peer-review or publicly scrutiny.
Relevance	Indispensable in the data-rich era for reliable and valid conclusions.	Enables researchers to sift through complex, voluminous datasets effectively.
Urgency	Addresses the need for accurate and timely research in a rapidly evolving ADHOGS and DVUCA environment.	Allows for timely hypothesis testing and strategy changes across sectors.

Note. ADHOGS=automation, digitalization, hyperconnectivity, obligations, globalization, and sustainability; DVUCA=disruptive, volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.

(Lim, 2024b)

Appendix III



Double Hermeneutic Circle (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014)

Appendix IV



Figure 3. Example fields of study in which “Voice Research” could be produced.

(Ragan and Maxfield, 2021)