



MIXED METHODS – COMBINING INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

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COMBINING INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

- Questionnaires and interviews are often used together in mixed method studies. For example, in investigating educational assessment (Brookhart & Durkin, 2003; Lai & Waltman, 2008).
- While questionnaires can provide evidence of patterns amongst large populations, qualitative interview data often gather more in-depth insights on participant attitudes, thoughts, and actions (Kendall, 2008).



CHECK METHODOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION

- If you are going to use both Interviews and Questionnaires, makes sure this is justified within your choice of methodology
- Do their complementary strengths/weaknesses make sense for your study?
 - Questionnaires tend to be viewed as providing more objective data
 - Extrapolation for large data sets to generalised inductions
 - But results influenced by design, respondent reliability/honesty, errors in processing
 - And results still have to be interpreted, which is never 'objective'
 - Interviews tend to be viewed as producing more qualitative data
 - Based on personal interactions so results more contextualised than generalised – danger of bias
 - More nuanced, yet structured ones can leave little room for the unexpected
 - interviewer can lead the interviewee, so directing the findings
 - Interviewees may respond as they think the interviewer would want or as they believe acceptable
 - In unstructured lots of data may still may still lead to small sample sizes
 - Findings always contingent and sample sizes small, so not conducive to generalised findings



HOW CAN A COMBINATION BEST WORK IN PRACTICE?

- As with all things worth doing, there is a balance to be struck
- It could be that one aspect of your project lends itself more to the Questionnaire, and another to the Interview
- It could be that a combination of the two lends insight into both... Are there questions which will be answered differently at interview/on a questionnaire?

Surveys may confirm pre-empted outcomes whilst interviews explore unexpected trajectories for the research



TWO PRIME REASONS FOR USING MIXED METHODS

To achieve alignment
between data sets

- One method supports the other
e.g. structured interviews
building on data from
questionnaires)
- The rationale is that alignment
denotes rigor

To achieve complementary
data sets

- One method complements the
other and endows the project with
methodological richness
- The rationale here is more
exploratory... both data sets
analysed separately using methods
best suited to them and results
compared to see what resonates in
common between them.



COMPARING QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW AS MIXED METHOD RESEARCH

‘The majority of work done comparing questionnaire and interview methods has been in medicine and psychology, generally for the purpose of examining the validity of particular screening or diagnostic instrument (Reams & Twale, 2008; Valentinis et al., 2009). However, occasional studies appear in other discipline areas such as education (Villanova, 1984), information technology (Richman et al., 1999), and religious studies (Holm, 1982; Hunsberger & Ennis, 1982).’

Harris and Brown (2010)

This seems to indicate that alignment was the main aim of the mixed method research studied; to confirm findings.



Nonetheless, based on the literature reviewed and research experience, the following recommendations are made to assist researchers in education and social sciences who are trying to maximise the likelihood that their questionnaire and interview data will align:

1. Ensure interview prompts and questionnaire items are structured and highly similar.
2. Separate data collection by only a short period of time.
3. Present the object of interest in a highly concrete and specific way.
4. Anchor participant responses to a common context.
5. Focus on psychological objects that have simple internal structure (i.e., avoid hierarchical, complex structures).
6. Estimate agreement between methods, albeit cautiously in light of data distributions, using consensus and consistency procedures.

POINTERS FOR USING THE TWO METHODS TO ALIGN DATA



CONSIDERATIONS WITH AIMING FOR ALIGNMENT BETWEEN DATA SETS

- If you are going to argue that triangulation of data gathered from interview and from questionnaire can be mutually confirmatory, you need to think how precisely you will do this
- How are your results from the two methods confirmatory?
- How are they not distinct/complementary?
- Are they in fact distinct and complementary?





AN EXAMPLE OF A MIXED METHOD PROJECT USING DATA AS COMPLEMENTARY

Medicine project on the Tibetan Plateau

- Questionnaire covers types of disorder, diagnosis (tongue, urine, pulse) and treatment given (moxa, herbal remedies, massage), any dietary advice or other lifestyle recommendations
- Semi-structured interviews capture patients' health-seeking behaviour (why they sought treatment, why they chose a traditional medical practitioner over biomedicine etc.)



- An attraction of using mixed method research is that data gained through different methods may complement each other, overcoming weaknesses in individual methods.
- To achieve this affect, you could be better combining semi-structured/unstructured interviews with questionnaires to create methodological richness.
- But how can you ensure the data is complementary rather than parallel/distinct? How is it connected?

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN USING MIXED METHODS TO FORM COMPLEMENTARY DATA SETS



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