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Designing Strong Research Objectives and Questions: A Practical Framework

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Quantitative research objectives typically refer towards quantifying, measuring and analysing data to answer specific research questions. They are meant to determine the associations and relationships between variables in a study. They assess the occurrence and frequency of certain phenomena and compare populations or groups on varied measures. In addition, they test hypotheses and draw predictions statistically. They are further intended to explore trends and patterns within collected data and examine the impact of variables on outcomes. To make the research objectives forceful it is recommended that they should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-specific and clear keeping in view the scope of the study. On the other hand, quantitative research questions are intended to gather numerical data to obtain answers to stated questions or hypotheses. They typically involve measurement and the construction of relationships among variables. Research questions in the quantitative study must be clear, complex, specific, and measurable and can be answered within a specific time frame. They must ensure the collection of numerical data on which statistical methods can be employed to draw findings or conclusions. They typically involve population and variables and their relationship.

Research Objectives – An Introduction

Research objectives specify what the researcher intends to achieve. They further explain why the researcher is pursuing the study. In addition, they elucidate the purpose of the project or task undertaken and assist the researcher in focusing on his or her research. Generally, research objectives are stated in the introductory part of the research right after the research problem statement. They establish the depth as well as the scope of the study. Moreover, they contribute towards the sketching of research design. Most importantly, they explain how the undertaken study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge within a said discipline. Research objectives explain the intent the researcher is going to accomplish so they steer every step of a research process from developing the research design to the method of data collection, from building arguments to concluding (Ryan, 2023).

Though research objectives might evolve with the progress of the study, they must be aligned with the actual contents of the research. It is also imperative to distinguish between research objectives and aims. The research aim is typically a broad statement which refers towards the general purpose of the study. It is usually stated right after the problem statement and before the objectives

of the study. While, research objectives are more specific and indicate a particular focus as well as the approach of the undertaken study. Most typically, there is only one single aim in a research, but there might be multiple research objectives in a single study (Phair & Shaeffer, 2022).

Significance of Research Objectives

Research objectives are an essential component of research, being the crux of what the researcher intends to pursue. They are significant as they establish the scope, depth, and approach of the study. They assist the readers and evaluators to assess and analyse the research method as well as the conclusion of the study. Hence, it aids in avoiding unnecessary study or research. In addition, they are significant because they direct and guide the researcher to be more specific and relevant to the issue or area he or she is intending at. They steer the researcher to choose the appropriate research design as he or she is aware of what are his or her objectives and which method is more suitable to accomplish those objectives in a befitting manner. Lastly, research objectives are essential as they indicate how the undertaken research is going to extend and enhance the existing knowledge in the said discipline (Farrugia et al., 2010). They allow the researcher to exhibit up-to-date research, build arguments and excite an insightful debate.

How to Formulate Research Objectives

Once the problem in research is stated, then comes the phase to decide how to address that problem. It is where the research objectives are stated to amply tackle the problem statement. For that intent, there are several steps which assist the researcher in formulating the research objectives. The first is to decide or choose the research aim, which is a broad statement that reflects the problem statement. The second is to narrow down from a general and broad to a specific and concise step that may involve one or multiple steps to address the problem statement. It involves specific aspects that the researcher is pursuing. Thirdly, once the research aim is narrowed down to specific aspects, then comes the stage of stating research objectives. It is followed by explaining the research objectives clearly, concisely and specifically. They are framed in clear and concise declarative statements. It is also imperative to utilise accurate and clear verbs to describe research objectives so that they may characterize what the researcher intends to carry out (Haseeb, 2019). Subsequent are the instances of well sketched out research objectives

- To identify the factors effecting ELTs' competence in diagnosing reading fluency anxieties among ELLs.
- To evaluate the correlation existed between ELTs years in terms of experience and their expertise in diagnosing reading fluency anxieties among ELLs.
- To assess the tools and techniques implied by ELTs diagnosing reading fluency anxieties among ELLs.

SMART Research Objectives

It is an acronym which is utilized to describe the science of research objectives in a research study. It states that objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based. Specific means that research objectives should not be vague, unclear, and general, rather they should be clear, and specific to get the problem addressed being undertaken in the said study. Measurable means the researcher should set his objectives in a way that can be measured by him or herself, whether they have been achieved or accomplished during the study. Achievable means that though objectives must be challenging at the same time they must be feasible. It is recommended that before setting research objectives relevant background study i.e. primary and secondary data must be carried out by the researcher along with the research facilities i.e. library, lab, and database required to achieve the undertaken objectives. Relevant means that research objectives should be directly associated with the problem statement so that the undertaken study must contribute to existing knowledge in the said field or discipline in which the researcher is pursuing his or her study. Time-based indicates that it is indispensable to set timelines and targets while drawing research objectives so that the research study must be on track within a specific time to be completed (Ryan, 2023).

Research Questions – An Introduction

In quantitative studies, research questions are meant to inquire about the association and relationship among variables being studied or investigated. Quantitative research questions are precise, complex, arguable, feasible, relevant, and specific and are linked to either research design, variables, or population. Such research questions also attempt to discover the behaviour of participants about one or more variables. In addition, quantitative research questions are meant to describe the traits of variables being investigated in quantitative studies. These are further aimed to depict the differences between groups within the context of outcome variables like in comparative studies (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022). In addition, such research questions are meant to

indicate the trends and interaction among variables, like in relationship studies. Broadly speaking, quantitative research questions can be categorized into three major types. Descriptive research questions are meant to measure the responses of subjects to variables. Such questions also display variables to assess, analyse and measure the stated phenomenon (Khoo, 2012).

Example: What percentage of ELTs in public schools demonstrate proficiency in accurately diagnosing reading fluency anxieties among ELLs?

Comparative research questions in quantitative studies unearth the differences between groups, i.e. one group with outcome variable and the other without outcome variable. Such questions also compare the effects of variables.

Example: What is the difference in terms of percentage among ELTs in public schools who demonstrate proficiency in accurately diagnosing reading fluency anxieties between those who have received specialized training in ELT instruction and those who have not?

Relationship research questions in quantitative studies are intended to measure and define the trends, associations, and relationships between dependent and independent variables.

Example: Is there a significant correlation between the level of ELT's proficiency in accurately diagnosing reading fluency anxieties among ELLs and their years of experience teaching ELLs in public schools?

How to Formulate Research Questions?

Research questions are one of the prime components of a research project or task, hence it requires lots of consideration on the part of the researcher to formulate a single or multiple questions. For that, it is advisable to choose the area of study, issue, or problem first. If one area or topic is selected, then the researcher has to study the relevant and updated studies about the chosen field, area, or topic to contextualize and get relevant and updated know-how about the topic or phenomenon. Then the researcher has to narrow down his focus of attention towards a specific niche to be specific. Then, after narrowing down the niche, the researcher has to identify the research problem that he or she is going to address in his or her study. Once the research problem is laid down, then comes the stage of research aim or objective, which ultimately directs the researcher towards writing down research questions. Because, research questions heavily depend on what the researcher is aiming or looking at in the study. As research questions anchor the entire process of a research project or task, it requires lots of refining on the part of the researcher (McCombes, 2022). An example to formulate research questions from a research problem can be handy to mention here.

Research Problem: Teachers at public schools don't have the required skills to properly guide and recognize talented and gifted students at the secondary level.

Research Question: What practical steps or strategies can secondary school teachers utilize to recognize and guide gifted students in public schools?

Writing Strong Research Questions

Research questions are the prime facet that indicate what the researcher is looking for in the study. Good or strong research questions are essential parts of the research study which steer and direct the entire research project i.e. paper, thesis, or dissertation. In a shorter task, mostly an answer to a single question is being sought out, but in a bigger project such as a thesis or dissertation, multiple questions are being studied or searched out. But the key is that all questions must be centred around one single problem or issue being researched. To make research questions focused and strong, it is key to spend enough time to make them as much refine as possible to attain the attention of the target readers.

For the said purpose, a certain criterion is laid down which can assist a researcher in making his or her research questions strong and appropriate. Firstly, the research question needs to be focused and researchable. These need to be relevant to a single problem or issue. In case of multiple questions like sub-questions, these need to have alignment with the central issue or question. In addition, research questions must be researchable and answerable using a quantitative method of research. Questions must be such for which data may be collected and analysed to answer the stated questions. Secondly, research questions must be specific and

feasible. While structuring research questions, it is key to keep in view that one had enough time to access or collect data to answer the stated questions (McCombes, 2022).

Otherwise, narrowing down questions is a key strategy to make research questions specific. Moreover, the language and terms used in the questions must be simple, clear, and concise. Jargon and vague and broad terms are recommended to be avoided. Thirdly, research questions must be complex and arguable. These must not be merely to answer in no or yes. These must be complex enough to generate arguments and discussion, rather than simply providing closed-ended answers in single words or digits. Easily accessible facts can not be entitled as research questions because they don't require the collection of data, synthesise data and analysis of data to draw conclusions or answers to stated questions.

Fourthly, research questions must be original and relevant. Research questions must address a problem or a gap in existing knowledge in the said discipline. In addition, research questions must be such that they are not addressed or answered by anyone else previously. These must contribute to a social or academic debate to build foundations for the aspirant researchers of the said discipline to dive into in future. Lastly, it is also a good strategy to supplement main questions with sub-questions. Sub-questions are less complex as compared to main questions. However, sub-questions are not compulsory by any means rather they are meant to foster strengths to main questions especially when main questions are complex (Bouchrika, 2024).

Distinction between Research Questions and Objectives

Though these terms are often assumed interchangeably, there is a clear distinction between them, as they refer to two diverse aspects of a research project. Research questions are broad statements that direct and guide the overall direction of the stated research. They are meant to identify the main area or issue for which the researcher is pursuing the study. While on the other hand, research objectives are specific and measurable that the researcher aims to accomplish. Research questions assist in defining the scope of the study, while research objectives guide the research process. Such questions typically generate gaps in existing knowledge, while research objectives set clear and attainable targets and goals to accomplish. Research objectives are required to be in line with the research questions. In addition, research objectives define the specific outcomes that the researcher is looking for (Hunt et al., 2018). Last but not least, research questions and objectives are not mutually exclusive, as a single study may have more than one research question and objectives. However, a well-elaborated question leads the researcher to specific objectives that are required to answer a question.

Conclusion

Research objectives in quantitative study are significant as they provide a structured approach towards investigating and answering research questions. They direct and guide the researcher to precisely focus on the aim of the study. They provide objectivity to the study by drawing certain predefined criteria for data collection and analysis. Furthermore, they ensure the measurability of the numerical data and analysis through the use of statistical methods. They facilitate the researcher to make informed decisions through empirical evidence. Well-defined objectives assist the research to broadly generalise the results of the quantitative study. Overall speaking, research objectives serve as a roadmap to conduct a systematic statistical study that leads towards robust conclusions and meaningful contributions to existing knowledge using quantitative method.

As far as the significance of research questions in quantitative study is concerned, they play a pivotal role in directing the researcher to process the study and draw outcomes. They provide clear guidance and direction to the researcher to focus on in his or her area of study. They are imperative to attain measurability in terms of gathering numerical data and applying statistical methods to draw out findings. Not only that, but they ensure objectivity to quantitative study by discarding bias. Likewise, they ensure the stability and prediction of a hypothesis by enhancing scientific knowledge. They assist the researcher in addressing practical issues and provide real-world implications in various fields of human activity. Overall, quantitative research questions serve as a hub for systemic and rigorous analysis based on numerical data and statistical tools, leading to insightful findings and contributing to existing knowledge across disciplines.

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