

Unit Three: Introduction to Research Designs

Research Methodology
Survey Research Design

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Objectives

By the end of this lecture, students will be able to:

- Understand what a research design is and the role it plays in real world research.
- Define survey research and understand its essential characteristics.
- Describe different types of survey research.

Introduction



Now that you have developed a general notion of the common methodological approaches (i.e. quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods) which could be used to achieve various objectives (i.e. testing hypotheses/theories, an in-depth exploration of phenomena, generating theories...etc.). It only makes sense to see how one can technically plan to serve these purposes. The latter pertains to the strategies and the decisions you need to take for your inquiry (i.e. research design). In this unit, the term 'research design' will be explained before introducing and discussing the different research designs. As we dig deeper into discussing the different designs covered in this course, you will see that these designs are not opposing methods but rather exist on a continuum. The research designs covered and discussed should thus be considered flexible categories.

This handout will first introduce you to the definition of research design and its role in real-life research. We then focus on a typical quantitative research design: **survey research**. Next, you will learn the main characteristics of survey research designs and some of the types you could employ in your research. Finally, you will be signposted to few examples of survey research, so you can see it as an option for your dissertation next year and, potentially, for future inquiry projects well beyond this module.

Research Design

I

Definition

According to Trochim (2006), a research design is defined as: "...the overall strategy that you choose to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring you will effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data. **Note that your research problem determines the type of design you can use, not the other way around**"

Note

During classroom discussions, research designs were referred to as plans/outlines. It is possible to think about a plan differently depending on what you are looking for. As a researcher, you may plan every detail thoroughly in advance (i.e., you might decide the size of your sample, the data collection questions, the analysis methods and the written report at the end). However, you may be more flexible in allowing new insights to emerge as they emerge and enrich the overall process. The latter scenario is more likely to be followed by qualitative projects. It may sound ideal, but in reality, you may require both plans, whether you are a novice or an expert researcher. As an example, a student working on his or her final year dissertation project may need to collaborate closely with their supervisor on developing a researchable topic. They may also need to plan an outline. In the course of the project, however, they may need to revise their original plan in order for the process to proceed smoothly.

Survey Research Design

II

Among the various quantitative research designs that are used in the social sciences, surveys and experiments represent two of the most common examples. These designs often represent two extremes on a continuum. In the realm of true experimental research design, there are various methods, such as randomised controlled trials, quasi-experiments, natural experiments, and so on. Non-experimental designs, such as correlational and survey designs, tend to be on the other end of the spectrum, where correlational statistics are often used to quantify trends and measure relationships between variables in situations where correlational statistics are applied. As a general rule, it is widely believed that the use of surveys in this way can be regarded as an example of quantitative research in this way. A survey can, however, be used to answer open-ended questions in order to acquire rich and detailed data sets; hence, qualitative research can be conducted.

1. What do we mean by survey research?

Definition

Survey research design is defined by Check & Schutt (2012) as a process that "... involves the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions" (P.160).

Fundamental

Surveys can be used in almost any field, including English literature, and are not limited to any particular discipline. For example, to gain a better understanding of students'/teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge of English literature, one can conduct a survey.

2. Purposes of survey research design

Depending on the overall objective of the study, survey research designs can serve a variety of purposes. The following are some of the purposes for which survey research is used according to Isaac and Michael (1997): "to answer questions that have been raised, to solve problems that have been posed or observed, to assess needs and set goals, to determine whether or not specific objectives have been met, to establish baselines against which future comparisons can be made, to analyze trends across time, and generally, to describe what exists, in what amount, and in what context." (p. 136)

3. Characteristics of survey research

The methodological literature often discusses three main characteristics of survey research. Based on Kraemer (1991)'s identification, the first characteristic of survey research is its ability to describe specific aspects of a given population quantitatively. These aspects often examine the relationships between variables. As a second point, survey data are collected from people, which makes them subjective. The final element of survey research is the use of a selected segment of the population from which the results can be generalised to the entire population.

4. Types of survey research

There are many different forms and distribution methods for surveys:

1. Written Surveys

- Mail Surveys
- Group Administered Questionnaires
- Drop-off Surveys

2. Oral Surveys

3. Electronic Surveys

(Writing@CSU, 2005)

5. The 'open-ended and closed-ended' classification

Some survey researchers categorise their survey research according to the type of questions they include. An appropriate distinction to be made here is between open-ended and closed-ended survey questions.

Open-ended questions allow respondents to express their opinions in their own words. There are a number of benefits to using an open-ended question, including the ability to explore ideas that could otherwise not be explored and to gain additional insights (Salant & Dillman, 1994, p. 81 as cited in Glasow, 2005). As well as being useful in cases where the researcher is less familiar with the subject area and cannot offer specific response options.

A closed-ended question, on the other hand, will require the respondent to pick one of the possible answers from a given list of possibilities (McIntyre, 1999, p. 75 as cited in Glasow, 2005). When a question has closed-ended options with ordered choices, the respondent is required to evaluate each option independently of the other options.



Extra

As support materials in the e-learning platform, I have included two survey research studies demonstrating the use of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Check it out if you wish to learn more.

Bibliography and further reading



III

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