

# Quality in Mixed Methods Design in Applied Linguistics Research at Federal Universities of Pakistan

**Samreen Zaheer**

Department of English

National University of Modern Languages, Quetta Campus

## **Abstract**

*Increasing interest in mixed method approach in social and behavioral sciences has been observed in last couple of decades. Procedural integration of qualitative and quantitative methods has been addressed by studies. As this design is gaining currency in various disciplines, it was important to evaluate its efficiency and this need was realized in and met in some of the academic disciplines. However, only few studies have examined its use in applied linguistics and that too in general terms, or in contexts outside Pakistan. Therefore, the present study analyzes: i) the acknowledgement of the term mixed methods study in the research in applied linguistics conducted in Pakistani context; and ii) the concluding interpretations to notice the inference quality (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008) through the researcher's argument on the findings from the integrated methods to indicate the meta-inference. It is hoped that this paper, by elaborating the ways in which applied linguistics researchers design mixed methods studies, will contribute to the better understanding of the utilization of mixed methods in applied linguistics, particularly in English language teaching, and should therefore be of interest for researchers who are concerned with the scheming of mixed method research.*

**Key words:** Applied linguistics, inference quality, mixed methods

## **1. Background**

The field of applied linguistics is in its adolescence in Pakistan. It would take some time to get more recognition here as the development of this discipline is quite slow. As a teacher of applied linguistics, I have observed that in Pakistani cultural contexts there is a sort of fear among pupils to adapt to innovative environments, particularly in applied linguistics. As indicated by Zaidi (2002), Pakistan needs legitimate bureaus of applied linguistics in advanced education establishments. Applied linguistics has an expansive extension. Although it is globally connected with the English Language Teaching, it is not confined to the areas of etymology or English dialect instructing. It envelops interdisciplinary studies in human science, human studies, interpretation and discourse pathology. Connected phonetics is another wording. It initially showed up on the scene in the second large portion of the twentieth century. In the 1940s and 1950s, it was alluded to as the learning's investigation and instruction of the outside or second dialects. For any subject area to grow, it is necessary that there should be an ongoing research in it. While there are some language based research centers in Pakistan such as Sindhi Academy, Brahvi Academy, National Language Promotion Department, etc., there are no research centers of linguistics in Pakistan (Zaidi, 2002). These language institutions do not have even a single applied linguist working in them. There is no focus on acquisition planning regarding Pakistani languages. This is one of the root causes of its sluggish progress. Therefore, it is the need of the hour that government, in particular the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC), allocates funds for the establishment of research centers in the length and breadth of the country. This step would initiate inquiry into this emerging field. It is also mandatory that educational links be established with international research centers so as to create and maintain exclusive expectation of examination. To put it plainly, the administration and the HEC ought to commonly discharge reserves for the development of research. Shaping connections outside the nation would help us to exceed expectations here.

It is to be noted that no research method is absolute. There could be various dimensions of a single approach (McGrath, 1982). The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed probe into quantitative research. For instance, single-subject research design, quasi-experimental design and true experimental design were mostly prevalent. These days, quantitative models incorporate multiple variables. Against the traditional one-variable-dependent structure, multifarious variables contribute to the overall strength of the model. The best example is the causal comparative design and correlational design. On the other hand, qualitative research is no less important than the quantitative one. It emerged during 1990s. Works that provide complete detail of this paradigm and its allied designs include the 19 strategies offered by Wolcott (1990). He also explained the procedures underlying ethnographic research method. Other researchers have also contributed in the development of qualitative research process. For instance, the role of narrative researchers has been highlighted by Clandinin (2006); the basics of the phenomenological method have been explained by Moustakas (1994); the working of grounded theory has been highlighted by Corbin and Strauss (1990). Morgan (2013) thought about the two research ideal models as indicated by three fundamental qualifications: qualitative examination is normally inductive (produces hypothesis from perceptions) and quantitative examination is deductive (tests hypothesis from perceptions); qualitative examination is commonly subjective (accentuates implications and elucidation) and quantitative is ordinarily objective (underscores things that can be measured); qualitative examination is logical (stresses particular profundity and point of interest) and quantitative examination is general (underlines speculation and replication). Morgan (2013) further affirms that each of these systems has quality that can be caught when the more extensive purposes and strategies are connected with either qualitative examination or quantitative exploration. In such manner the most essential contention is, not what strategy a specialist utilizes but rather how and why a scientist utilizes them as a part of that way. These qualities were considered in their potential parts in mixed methods research.

The 1960s saw the presentation of a fresh out of the box new system: mixed methods. History lets us know that the quick pacing prominence of the blended strategy induced John Creswell to foresee that it would be the most prominent technique in the following five years. It is clear that Tashakkori and Teddlie's (2003) *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research* gave a rule to the scientists with hypothetical and viable gear for leading blended routines research. According to Yin (1994) triangulation gives a scope to the researcher to address wider social phenomenon by empowering him to draw a conclusion that is more persuading and precise. Mixed methods in the field of behavioral sciences were discussed by Lopez-Fernandez and Molina-Azorin (2011). They contended that many diverse fields can be promoted behavioral sciences by coordinating mixed methods in it. Utilization of mixed method approach in a study can have two central edges (Creswell et al. 2003). Firstly, the recognition of the integration principal of the qualitative and quantitative data in the study; additionally, in the chosen setup it is imperative to clear up the variables parted in the study. In this way, concerning the issue of priority, either qualitative or quantitative part is emphasized by the researcher is the decision that should be made unmistakably while dispensing the proportionate. This decision is reflected significantly in the discourse of the mentioned techniques. Second point of importance is the time orientation, that reflect in a way data is gathered either obtaining data at the identical time or the collection of data at different time frame.

The mixed methods were the result of a desire for the enhancement of methodological pluralism after the researchers in social sciences questioned the validity of the single method (Bryman, 1992). In social sciences Campbell and Fiske (1959) introduced the practice of mixed methods research. This 1959 article presented the notion of triangulation, referring to "multiple operationalism". The first comprehensive definition of the triangulation method was given by Denzin (1978) who asserts that for the examination of a same phenomenon different methods are combined. Following are the four types of triangulations outlined by Denzin: i) data triangulation (to use multiple sources in research); ii)

investigator triangulation (to use variety of researchers); iii) theory triangulation (to construe result of the study from various prospects and theories); and, iv) methodological triangulation (to study a research problem by using several methods). Sechrest and Sidana (1995) outlined methodological pluralism, as they call it, for the four stages of research. Sechrest and Sidana asserted that through methodological pluralism: (a) the purpose for verification can be authenticated; (b) possible errors can be estimated in the underlying measures; (c) data process can be observed and (d) data analysis can be more meaningful.

Hence, the perception of validity for mixed methods research has yet to be outlined. The concept of validity is so general now that it can be connoted with anything as the term includes so many meanings that no single concept can be associated with it (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003). In the *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research* (Tashakkori&Teddlie, 2003), 15 sections were devoted in the index, but the clear concept of validity information was not presented. A typology of mixed method legitimation was offered by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006). The new term legitimation was used in place of validity because of its neutrality. The typology includes sample integration legitimation, inside–outside legitimation, weakness minimization legitimation, sequential legitimation, conversion legitimation, paradigmatic mixing legitimation, commensurability legitimation, multiple validities legitimation, and political legitimation. The basic concept of the model was to focus on the integrated designs of a mixed methods study.

Later, the expansion of inferential quality model was discussed by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2008). This model suggested the legitimacy of mixed methods research in general. Two components of inferential quality, design quality and interpretive rigor are assessed by examining the qualitative and quantitative approach specified criteria at each step of the study. The design quality consists of (a) design suitability, (b) design adequacy or fidelity, (c) within-design consistency, and (d) analytic adequacy. Indicative quality is indicated by the following: (a) interpretive consistency, (b) theoretical consistency, (c) interpretive agreement, (d) interpretive distinctiveness, and (e) integrative efficacy.

Leech and Delinger (2007) presented the validity framework based on the traditional concept of validity of qualitative and quantitative elements. In this framework Leech and Delinger (2007) introduced many terms such as: a) foundational element which reflects the prior knowledge of the researcher on the construct phenomenon, which paves a guideline to new to the course of researcher's observation, choice of methods used, data collection and data analysis strategies; to attain this prior knowledge of the construct under study, theoretical and empirical literature needed to be analyzed by the researcher in the intended area studied; and b) Inferential consistency which "focuses on what is appropriate given the study design, measurement, and analysis" (Leech & Delinger, 2007. p. 324). To validate the construct Utilization/ Historical element use as source of construct validity evidence that depends on the number of inferences are used to represent the construct. Consequential element is determined by the acceptability of the consequences of the study.

In this backdrop, the present study attempts to answer the following two questions:

How is the concluding section developed in mixed method research?

How is the methodological section developed in mixed method research?

## **2. Data Gathering**

A purposive sample was used as a data source to conduct this study (see Benson et al., 2009; Bryman, 2008; Teddlie & Yu, 2007) of articles, and M. Phil and PhD theses in applied linguistics published or produced by scholars at the federal government universities of Pakistan. The thrust of this study is i) the acknowledgement of the term mixed methods study; and ii) inference quality. Inference quality was noticed through the concluding interpretations and researcher's argument on the findings from the integrated methods to indicate the meta-inference.

### **3. Data analysis**

#### **3.1 Inference quality**

Discussions and conclusion sections were examined to establish Inference Quality, using Tashakkori and Teddlie's (2008) "integrative model of inference quality in mixed methods research" (p. 112). Inference quality was introduced for the integrity and the legitimacy of mixed method research. This term is divided into design quality (to determine the methodological accuracy in mixed methods research) and interpretive rigor (to evaluate the conclusion's validity, see Lincoln & Cuba, 2000). Expanded framework of Teddlie and Tashakkori's (2008) defines design suitability as appropriateness of the research methods with the research questions. Design adequacy/fidelity refers to the effectiveness of the application of modules of the design. Analytic adequacy deals the data analysis techniques and its appropriateness to answer the research questions adequately. Within-design consistency inference emergence is referred to the consistency of the design.

The interpretive consistency deals with the consistency of conclusion and findings. Theoretical consistency observes the consistency of the inference with the current theories. Interpretive addresses the interpretative construction of reality among the researchers and the participants. Interpretive distinctiveness refers to the distinctness of the inferences from the possible elucidated results. Integrative efficacy deals with the integration of findings, and results collected from the qualitative and quantitative approaches in mixed method research.

The first aspect which was noticed is the description of the research designs in the study. A very few studies acknowledged the term 'mixed methods' as a large number of studies employed other terms such as 'qualitative and quantitative methods', 'triangulation', and 'multiple data'. . Some of the studies that used term mixed method in their methodology section cite it as quoted below:

[11]<sup>1</sup> “I have used a combination of both methods (qualitative as well as quantitative) which is generally known as mixed method”.(Hameed, 2012, p. 72)

[12] “The study is empirical and descriptive in nature. It is a mixed-methods study that integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis”.(Hussain, 2013, p. 46)

[19] “Current study was descriptive in nature yet the design of the study was ‘Mixed approach’ that involved both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a study. (Mukhtar, 2013, p. 43)

As stated above, most of the studies employed the term ‘qualitative and quantitative’ instead of ‘mixed methods’ to justify the methods that were employed in their studies. Some of them have been quoted below:

[7] “For carrying out this research, both qualitative and quantitative paradigms were used to give objectivity and authenticity to the data”.(Bashir, 2009, p. 5)

[9]” .., so the research is triangulation. By combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, the data can be made more authentic and the study more in depth”. (Gul, 2010, p. 29)

[10] “In order to understand the phenomena understudy, two research methodologies (qualitative and quantitative) were combined”.(Gulzar, 2009, p. 97)

Similar description was given in data Source [16], [18], [22], [24], [28], [29], and [30] employed the term qualitative and quantitative, which shows the emerging but not deep knowledge of mixing qualitative and quantitative strands.

[15] “Thus, the researcher, following the quantitative measures during her experimental research ... my research employed the qualitative mode of inquiry as well, to discuss and analyze the class procedures and

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<sup>1</sup>The numbers in the square brackets refer to the data source provided in the Data Source Bibliography in Appendix A



learners' performance(s) thoroughly, during the research period to generate verbal information".(Jabeen, 2013, p. 43)

[35] "The purpose of this qualitative-quantitative research that aligns philosophically with the constructivist paradigm is essentially to understand and describe the factors that form the linguistic realities of the Pakistani language learners at the target level".(Zulfiqar, 2011, p. 101)

It was observed that the utilization of the qualitative and quantitative approaches was to gain maximum benefits and allow the researcher to use variety of research instruments, strategies and procedures for data gathering and analysis. As mentioned by Hammersly (1996) the combination of the methods (qualitative and quantitative) is either for the verification of the findings of the one method by the other; one method may provide groundwork for the other; to complement each other or all of them. In order to achieve the holistic picture of the process of the study these methods were combined. Thus, the incorporation of the methods with the possibilities of investigation was mentioned and acknowledged by many researchers in their studies.

[3] "To explore these issues a qualitative approach has been used...the quantitative method provided the researcher an opportunity to assess the dispositions of individuals by taking their views and opinions about the medium of education and the outcomes of education."(Ashraf, 2004, p. 165)

The above extract illustrates the point that researcher incorporated the qualitative and quantitative approaches as two distinct methods and the integration was not considered as a whole mixed methods research which either shows lack of knowledge of the design or skepticism for its authenticity.

Some studies employed the term for the collection of data only despite the fact that the triangulation was used in the analysis stage.

[6] “Methodological triangulation was used to collect data for the purpose of the study because of the potential drawback of interviews or questionnaires alone”. (Aziz et al., 2013, p. 12887)

[20] “The survey method was used to collect the information and compare the curriculum objectives, contents, teaching methodology and examination system of SSC and GCE O-level English language course”.(Naeem, 2011, p. 78)

[34] “I opted for the use of ‘multi method’ approach offered by the case study method of research as this approach allows both the qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection”.(Waseem, 2007, p. 99)

Some of the studies did not mention the overall research design methodology although they discussed the research design strategy. This aspect of description was most commonly used by the writers of the articles under study.

[30] “The research was constructed in an experimental research framework....”(Farooq et al., 2013)

[17] “This research is based on qualitative analysis of school textbooks.....”(Khan, 2014, p. 59)

It is revealed that many studies such as [2], [4], [23], [26], and [33] did not acknowledge the mixed method design or any other term used for it.

### **3.2 Development of meta-inferences**

The second aspect of the study was to explore the meta-inferences development in concluding section. As it has been mentioned before that one aspect of inference quality (Tashakkori&Teddlie, 2008) was considered. The conclusion and the discussion sections of the studies depicted that data integration was not presented in the studies and meta-inferences development was not on the basis of the integration of qualitative and quantitative inferences. From most of the studies it is evident that findings and interpretations were merely offering the summary of findings.

[1] “In the light of the statistical analysis and findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn....”(Ahmed, 2011, p. 100)

[4] “The present paper has explored the functions of code switching by the teachers at the universities of Islamabad”. (Awan, 2011, p. 12)

[17] “In conclusion, the analysis of the textbooks was meant to highlight the pattern of gender identity formation recurrent in the language of textbooks”. (Khan, 2014, p. 73)

[20] “On the basis of analysis of data and findings of the study, following conclusions were drawn....” (Naeem, 2011, p. 212)

[32] “The data collected through personal observation, questionnaires, interviews and students’ inventories clearly show that Pakistani learners are immature readers and they are functionally illiterate”. (Sultana, 2003, p. 126)

[33] “The analysis of the data reveals that four languages skills are in a practical yet inquiry based framework”.(Tauseef, 2015, p. 52)

From the above examples it can be inferred that the research presented the general results of the study, though the integration of qualitative and quantitative strands were employed in the data collection and in the data analysis stages but the meta inference was not formed by considering the qualitative and quantitative integration. Rather, these general inferences presented informative summaries of the findings. So it is analyzed that qualitative and quantitative integrated sections did not appear independently.

The current results demonstrate that the concept of inference quality was barest mentioned. One may say that the concept of mixed method has not been practiced in the field of applied linguistics. This might be the reason that inferences of qualitative and quantitative findings were not found in the data source. As pointed out by Creswell et al. (2008) the lack of quality inference may be a consequence of the concept of applying independent strands to develop data rather merging qualitative and quantitative data. Thus most of the studies in data source present general conclusions and summaries of findings, but this was probably build up to

supplement their arguments, discussion and findings. Integration of the results denotes meaningful conclusions on the basis of consistent and inconsistent results of qualitative and quantitative strands. It does not necessarily mean to draw a single consideration on the results of qualitative and quantitative strands (Tashakkori&Teddlie, 2008).

As mixed method research is comparatively a new practice specifically in applied linguistics with very short history, perhaps this might be the reason that few studies used a term mixed method approach in their methodological section. In this regard our methodological section should describe the design very carefully that is used in our studies. Although applied linguistics is in debt to mixed method research that affords opportunities to overcome the war between the two paradigms and give a prospect to use methods match and provide the answers to the objectives of the problems, only a few studies reported the explicit justification for using mixed methods approach rather their main objective was to justify the comprehensiveness of the study to validate the different methods in terms of addressing the overall research question. The strengths of the qualitative and quantitative methods were discussed by some of the studies. Creswell and Clark (2007) affirm the trend of not espousing the idea of match between the methods and the problem. They declared situation as a deciding factor for the preference of the mixed method research to address the problem that researchers tend not to explain explicitly the idea behind the statement that the methods should match the problem. They assert that the use of mixed methods research in a study depends on the problem that is addressed.

For the investigation of integration quality in applied linguistics; an operational evaluative criteria needs to be address. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2008), design quality and quality of meta-inferences are the two crucial aspects of high quality integration. Interpretations of the study at all the stages affirm the qualitative and quantitative components. In this way research quality in applied linguistics can be enhanced and the practical consideration of language teaching and learning can be substantiated.

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## Appendix

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