

WHAT IS RESEARCH?

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Any honest attempt to study a problem systematically or to add to man's knowledge of a problem may be regarded as research. (Theodorson and Theodorson 1969 cited in Reber 1995, p.663)

The aim, as far as I can see, is the same in all sciences. Put simply and cursorily, the aim is to make known something previously unknown to human beings. It is to advance human knowledge, to make it more certain or better fitting . . . the aim is, as I have said, discovery. (Elias 1986, p.20)

WHY UNDERTAKE RESEARCH?

- To investigate some existing situation or problem.
- To provide solutions to a problem.
- To explore and analyse more general issues.
- To construct or create a new procedure or system.
- To explain a new phenomenon.
- To generate new knowledge.
- A combination of two or more of any of the above.

(Hussey and Hussey 1997)

Quality research is the lifeblood of any scientific discipline. Without it, disciplines would stagnate, failing to advance past their current limits and understanding.

(Wann 1997 p.17)

TYPES OF RESEARCH

Exploratory research

Takes place where there is little or no prior knowledge of a phenomenon.

This type of research attempts to gain some familiarity with the appropriate concepts and looks for patterns or ideas without any preconceived ideas or explanation.

Descriptive research

Describes a particular phenomenon, focusing upon the issue of what is happening, or how much of it has happened, rather than why it is happening.

Explanatory research

This type of research is involved in explaining *why* something happens, and assessing causal relationships between variables.

Predictive research

Forecasts future phenomena, based on the interpretations suggested by explanatory research.

PURE AND APPLIED RESEARCH

Pure research takes place to explore a particular concept, or issue, without regard for a specific problem, and may be carried out to simply gain a better understanding of the overall concepts.

Applied research is undertaken to solve a specific problem or provide a solution to a practical question.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESEARCH

Primary research

Refers to research that has involved the collection of original data specific to that particular research project, for example through using research methods such as questionnaires or interviews.

Secondary research

Refers to research where no such original data is collected, but the research project uses existing (or secondary) sources of data, for example census or archive data.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Theoretical research generally uses the findings from existing works to develop new ideas through analysing existing theory and explanations. These new ideas are not tested through collecting evidence in the form of primary data.

Empirical research supports the development of new ideas through the collection of data (empirical = observation or measurement rather than theoretical reasoning).

HOW TO READ RESEARCH

1. Locate and read a few articles from within a field you are comfortable with.
2. Read studies that are of interest to you.
3. Read the abstract first.
4. Identify the research question and objectives.
5. Why did the researcher(s) choose a particular setting or sample?
6. What were the methods chosen to collect data?
7. What were the most important findings?
8. Do not be over-concerned with statistical analysis.
9. Be critical but objective.

WHAT IS RESEARCH - SUMMARY

1. There are a number of definitions of research. Defining research is less important than understanding its nature.
2. Research is important for the advancement of any academic field or discipline.
3. Research can be classified as exploratory, descriptive, explanatory or predictive depending upon its purpose. It can also be classified as either theoretical or applied depending upon the level of application of the findings to 'real life' situations.

SUMMARY II

4. Research may involve the collection of new data (primary research) or the use of existing data (secondary research).

5. The best way to begin to develop your understanding of research, its role, and the types of research is to undertake some reading. Choose some appropriate articles, and begin to read!