

Theological Research Methods

Dr Annang Asumang

Daniel Institute: MASM 826 Theological Research Methods

The course will focus on research methods with application to the study of theology. The primary goal of the course is to provide broad practical understanding and competency in social science methods applied to theological research. Topics covered include conceptual issues, ethics, literature review, research design, techniques for data collection, tools for data analysis, sampling, various qualitative methods of data collection and analysis and publication. Basic statistical methods will be covered. Students will be introduced to the use of software in data analysis (NVIVO for qualitative research).

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Construct Concise Research Problem Statement
2. Craft Review of Scholarship
3. Enumerate Research Objectives
4. Identify Suitable Research Method
5. Draft Research Proposal

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Course Overview

1. Introduction
2. Research Methods in Biblical Studies
3. Research Methods in Systematic Theology
4. Research Methods in Practical Theology
5. Searching and Reviewing Scholarship
6. Designing Your Research
7. Research Ethics and Challenges
8. The Research Proposal
9. Scholarly Writing
10. Theological Research Clinic

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What is Theological Research?

A carefully structured and systematic investigation of a biblical or theological problem with a view of providing its solution and / or clarifying its nature

Like preparing an essay

- Both have argument as central feature
- Both have similar structure: Introduction – Body – Conclusion
- Essay question is set by examiner but dissertation questions are set by student
- Essay may defend an opinion but dissertation must offer rigorous evidence for conclusions
- Engagement of scholarship more pronounced in dissertation

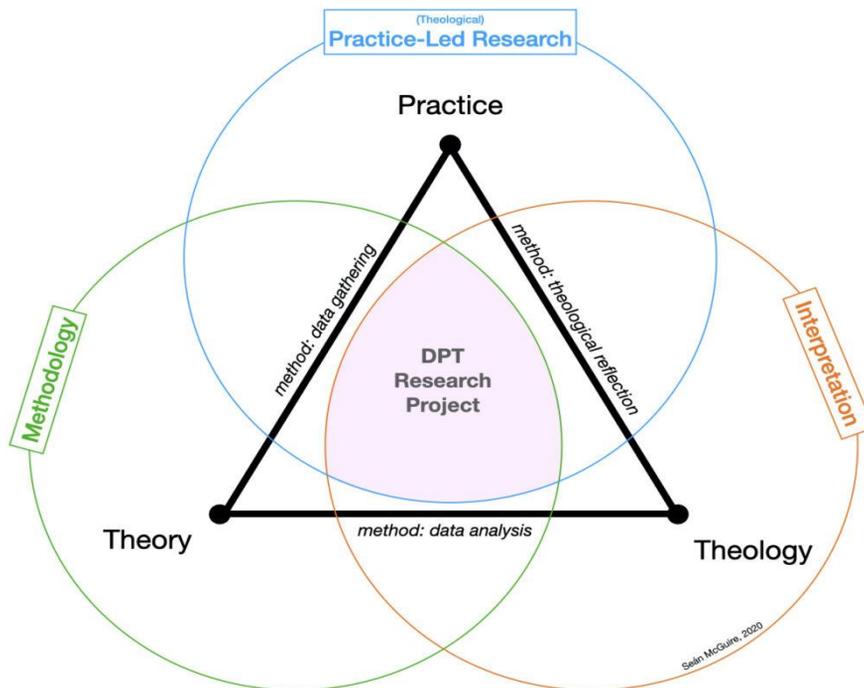
Why Research?

1. Hermeneutical: Understanding & apply Scripture
2. Discipleship: Facilitates Spiritual formation
3. Ecclesiological: Church problems require answers
4. Missional: How to advance the Gospel
5. Societal: Pose more fruitful questions
6. Educational: Foster learning culture in the Seminary

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The logo for the Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies is a yellow rectangular box with the journal's name in a black serif font.

Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies

[AJPS 24.1 (February 2021), pp. 39-54]

Creating and Expanding a Research Culture at Pentecostal and Charismatic Seminaries and Graduate Schools in the Majority World¹

by Dave Johnson



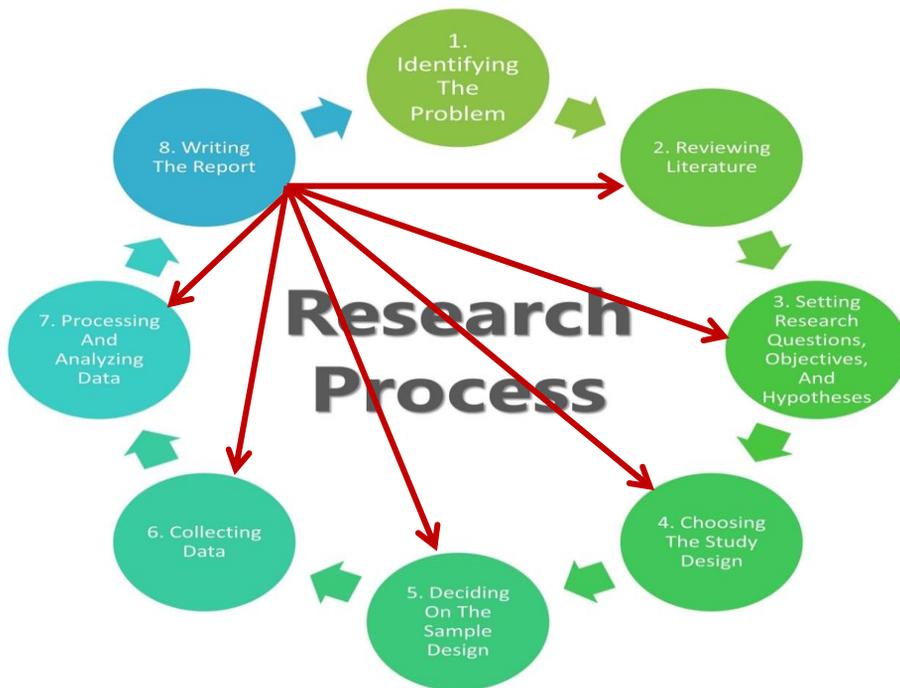
Many have been frustrated by the fact that western books do not totally address the theological, missiological, and pastoral issues in the Majority World. Also, the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement (PC) in the Majority World, as well as other evangelicals, has experienced stupendous growth, but is often lacking in discipleship and maturity. I believe that part of the answer to these issues is to be found in creating and actively maintaining a research culture on our Majority World seminary campuses and online communities that will provide scholars with the atmosphere and resources to engage in research, reflection, writing, and publishing opportunities to address these issues.

[Johnson 2021:39]

Basic Assumption of Scholarship

“As a researcher and a true scholar, you cannot simply accept the word of others at face value; you must evaluate it on the basis of evidence and sound argument and be prepared to disagree and criticize. This is a fundamental part of what it means to exercise your independence and autonomy”

Murray, Neil, and David Beglar. “Inside track: writing dissertations and theses”. London: Longman, 2009:6



Adam Grant ✓
@AdamMGrant

Writing isn't what you do after you have an idea. It's how you develop an inkling into an insight.

Turning thoughts into words sharpens reasoning. What's fuzzy in your head is clear on the page.

"I'm not a writer" shouldn't stop you from writing. Writing is a tool for thinking.

Thesis in Theological Discipline

A rigorous piece of academic writing based on, and sometimes written in tandem with, an independent and original research, submitted as partial or full fulfilment of requirement for university degree.

[PROPOSED THESIS TITLE]

by

[INSERT YOUR FULL NAME]

A RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR THE

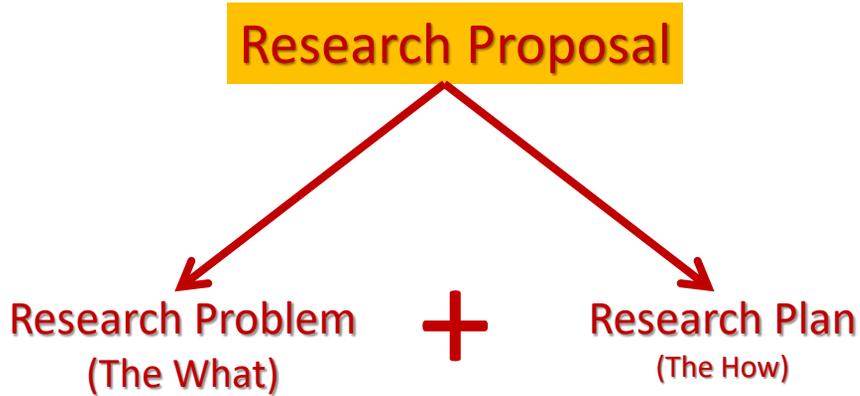
[MASTER/DOCTOR] OF THEOLOGY PROGRAMME

[Length of intended thesis: 60 credit/90 credit/180 credit]

at

DANIEL INSTITUTE

[MONTH YEAR]



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**Research starts with
Identifying a problem
Defining the problem and
Articulating it as
the problem statement**

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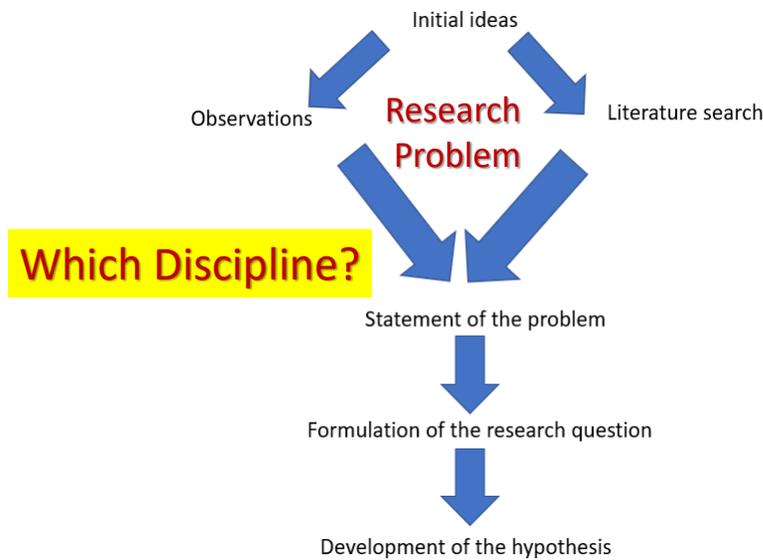


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Defining the Research Problem



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The Three Seminary Disciplines

1. Biblical Studies

- Text-based discipline

2. Systematic Theology

- Ideas based discipline

3. Practical Theology (Applied Theology or Church & Society)

- Practice focused discipline

Integrated/Inter-disciplinary Research

- **Drivers for Inter-disciplinary Research**
 - Many problems naturally straddle more than one discipline
 - Need for inter-disciplinary collaboration makes integration attractive
 - Often appreciated outside the research community
- **Advantages of Inter-disciplinary Research**
 - Most problems are not neatly sequestered in one discipline
 - Heightens the relevance and contribution of the study
 - Enriches the researcher's expertise across the disciplines
 - Produces rounded scholars
- **Disadvantages of Inter-disciplinary Research**
 - Difficult to narrow the scope of integrated research at postgraduate level
 - May result in lack of in-depth analyses of the problems (word count limitations)
 - Limited supervisor expertise
 - Examiners may not be able to appreciate developments in other fields

It is prudent to narrow a research problem to one discipline

However ideas and insights from other disciplines
will enrich the conduct of the study

**A problem in Practical Theology should have insights from
Biblical Exegesis & Systematic Theology as part of solution**

**A Problem in Biblical Studies should have some insights from
Practical & Systematic Theology as part of solution**

Defining the Research Problem

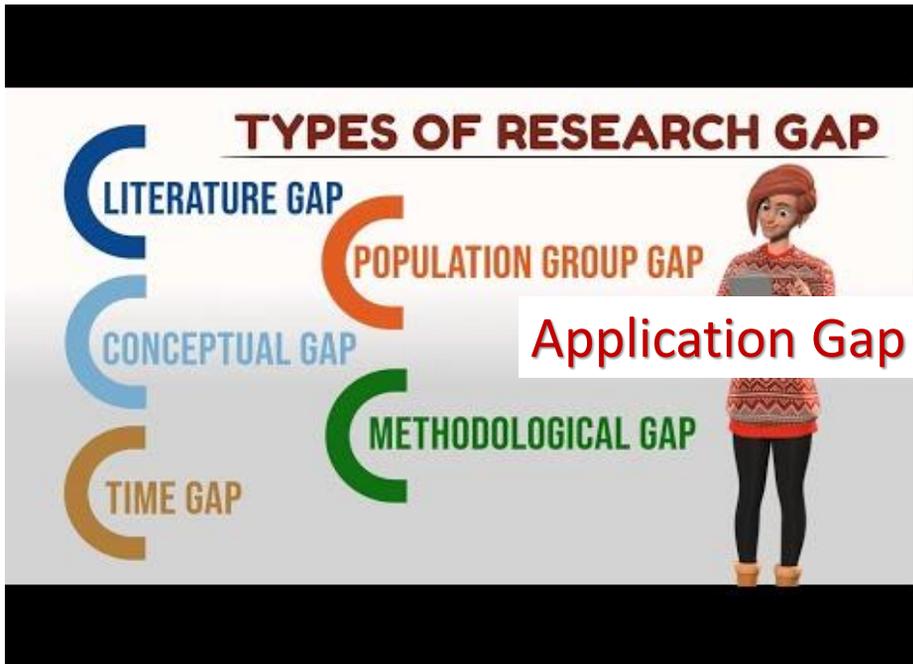
- **Consideration in Selecting a Research Problem**

1. **Interest:** A research is usually time consuming and involves hard work and possibly unforeseen problems. One should select topic of great interest to sustain the required motivation.
2. **Magnitude:** It is extremely important to select a topic that you can manage within the time and resources at your disposal. Narrow the topic to something so it becomes manageable, specific and clear.
3. **Level of expertise:** Make sure that you have adequate level of expertise for the task you are proposing since you need to do the work yourself.
4. **Relevance:** Ensure that your study adds to the existing body of knowledge, bridges current gaps and is useful in policy formulation.
5. **Availability of data:** Before finalizing the topic, make sure that data are available.
6. **Practicability :** Regarding the time, money, resources, geographic area, the research problem should be practical.
7. **Ethical issues:** How ethical issues can affect the study population and how ethical problems can be overcome should be thoroughly examined at the problem formulating stage.
8. **Overdone subject:** Subject which is overdone should not be chosen, for it will be difficult task to throw any new light in such a case.
9. **Controversial subject:** Should not become the choice of an average researcher.
10. **Researchable and Manageable:** The research problem should fit the level of researcher's level of research skills, needed resources, and time restrictions; too narrow topic should be avoided.

Finding Problems from “Gaps”

Six types of Gaps:

1. **Gap in Knowledge** – what is not known about the subject
2. **Gap in Relationship** – what is not known about links or relationship between various elements of the subject
3. **Gap in Theory** – what is not known about how a theory may function in a different context
4. **Gap in Method** – what is not known about how a particular method could be used for another scenario
5. **Gap in Application** – How an established knowledge may be applied to solve another problem
6. **Gap in Analysis** – investigating a phenomenon using a particular analytic approach



Tips for Getting Problem to Research?

- Which discipline best captures your interest
- What subject in the discipline interests you most
- Write an overview of the subject of interest
- Identify a narrower area of interest or problem
- Test the relevance of the subject with others
- Preliminary literature search using keywords
- Narrow the scope based on the search
- Construct a preliminary title
- Write up a brief survey of scholarship
- Refine the title and test idea with others

Example of Getting Problem to Research?

- **Which discipline best captures your interest**
 - Practical Theology
- **What subject in the discipline interests you most**
 - Church especially Youth work
- **Write an overview of the subject of interest**
 - Social Media & Youth
 - E.g., Ononogbu & Chiroma 2018 Social media and youth ministry in Nigeria
- **Identify a narrower area of interest or problem**
 - Design of a Youth Discipleship course using Tit Tok
- **Test the relevance of the subject with others**
 - Talk to other Youth Workers and Pastors
- **Preliminary literature search using keywords**
 - Use Relevant Research tools

Example of Getting Problem to Research?

- **Narrow the scope based on the search**
 - To Design of a Youth Discipleship course using Tit Tok in my Church
- **Construct a preliminary title**
- **Write up a brief survey of scholarship**
- **Refine the title and test idea with others**

Characteristics of a Good Research Problem

1. Interesting to the Researcher.
2. The scope of the problem is manageable (not too broad) by the researcher (focus on narrowing down to specific and manageable).
3. The researcher has the knowledge ,time and resources needed to investigate the problem.
4. The problem can be researched through collection and analysis of data
5. Investigating the problem has theoretical or practical significance.
6. It is ethical to investigate the problem.

The Problem Statement

A concise single sentence (at most short paragraph) statement, question or objective which articulates the problem within its scope that the research seeks to answer

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What would you do if you get an idea to research Exorcism in Mark's Gospel?

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Research Problem Statement



Research Questions

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Formulating Research Questions

- Turn Problem Statement into the Main Question.
- Break the Question down into sub-questions
- Ensure each Step of the research methodology is governed by a sub-question
- Questions may need adjusting to reduce scope or refocus on outcome as the study proceeds

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Five “W”s to consider in Formulating Research Question

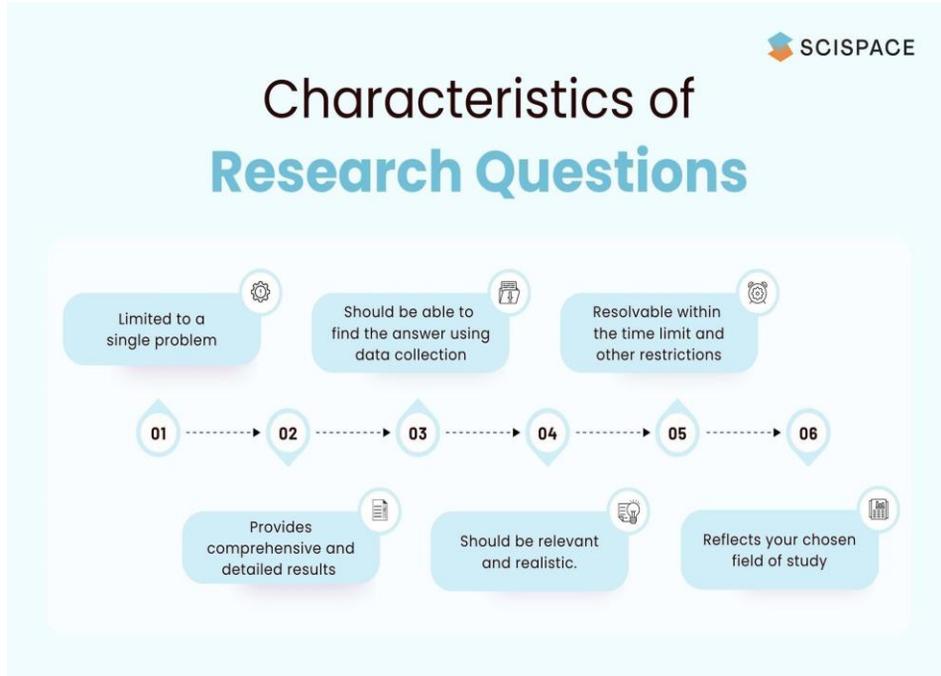
Questions to consider when developing the research question

WHO?	TO WHAT EXTENT?	WHEN?	WHERE?	WHY?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific group? • Gender? sex? • Age? ethnicity? • Key figures? • Socioeconomic status? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the issues? • Are there any unanswered questions? • Are these sub-topics? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this a current issue? • Is it related to a specific period of time? • Was there an event related to this issue? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you narrow to a specific geographic location or boundary? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is this issue interesting? • Why should others be interested?

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Research Idea: Attendances at Midweek evening service

Research Problem: Reduced attendances at Midweek evening service

Research Problem Statement:

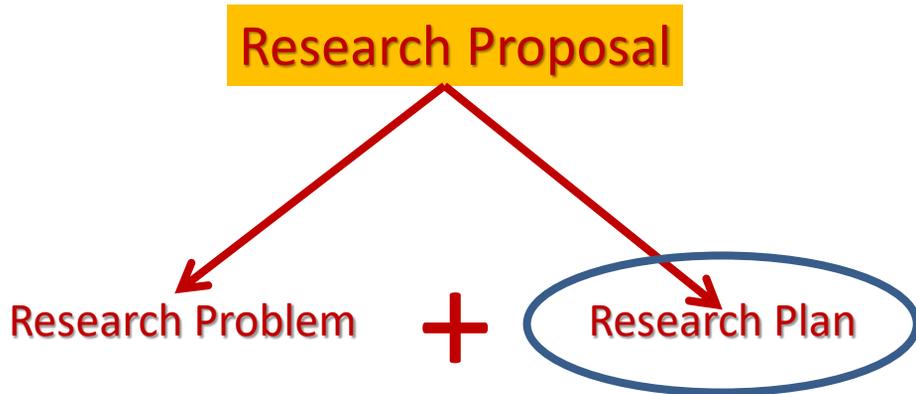
1. What are the Reasons for reduced attendances at Midweek evening service since 2020?

OR

2. How can attendances at Midweek evening services be improved to levels before 2020?

OR

3. How can attendances at Midweek evening services be improved to 30% of Sunday attendance?



Research Plan

A detailed, stepwise and coherent account of the precise process to get answers to the problem together with justifications and defence of why various choices are made, what tools and resources will be required and what assumptions and theoretical presuppositions underpin the plan

Components of Research Plan

1. Research Design
2. Research Methodology

Research Design

The overall strategy which coherently drives the processes and choices of various components of the research

Approaches to Research Design

Largely Dependent on Discipline

1. Literary/Theoretical Research
2. Empirical Research
 - Quantitative
 - Non-Quantitative

Research Methodology

The general technical issues regarding methods (i.e., case or sample selection, data collection and analysis), and to the theory and conceptualization of methods

1. The Theoretical/philosophical Framework
2. The Data to be collected
3. The Tools to be used for collecting Data
4. The Step of the study

Research Problem Statement:

How can attendances at Midweek evening services be improved to 30% of Sunday attendance?

Research Design:

- **Which Discipline?** - Practical Theology
- **Which Approach?** Empirical Research
 - Largely Qualitative but with Quantitative aspects

Research Methodology:

1. **Framework:** Depends on the chosen Practical Theological Method
2. **Data:** Determined by Research Questions
3. **Tools:** Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, Surveys
4. **Steps:** Determined by chosen method and Research Questions

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Research Problem Statement:

How can attendances at Midweek evening services be improved to 30% of Sunday attendance?

Research Methodology:

1. **Framework:** Depends on the chosen Practical Theological Method
2. **Data:** Determined by Research Questions
3. **Tools:** Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, Surveys
4. **Steps:** Determined by chosen method and Research Questions

Research Questions:

Main: How can attendances at Midweek evening services be improved to 30% of Sunday attendance?

Sub-questions

1. Why are midweek attendances below expectation?
2. How can we identify the solution to the problem?
3. What should be the ideal (biblical and theological) midweek service?
4. What practical measures (or strategies) will help improve attendance?

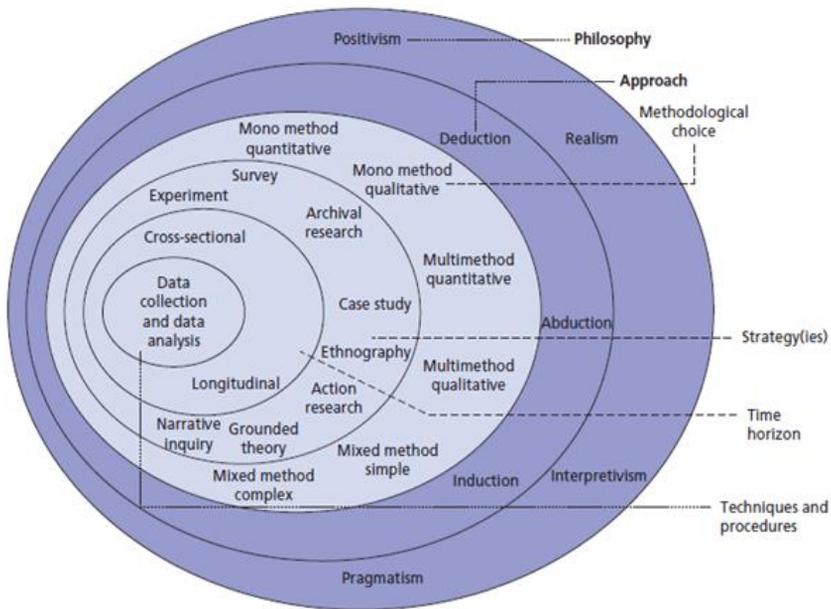
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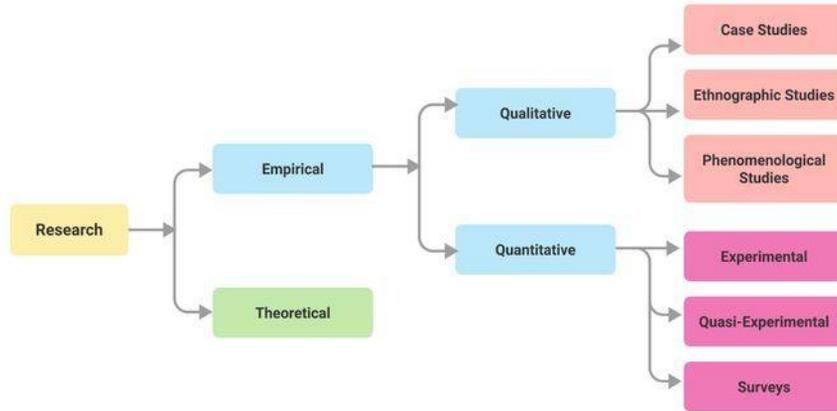
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Research Methodology	VS	Research Method
Refers to a process for effectively addressing research problems		Describes the methods that the researcher uses to conduct the research
Investigate the various methods that can be used to conduct experiments, tests, surveys		It involves conducting an experiment, test, survey
Used to find a solution to the research problem		Used to achieve the research objective
Aims to answer this question. How did the researcher complete his study?		Aims to answer this question. What tools did the researcher use to complete his research?
Any research must start with research methodology because it provides the way for choosing the most suitable research methods		Research, whether it be scientific or not, must have research methods

From Methodology to Method



Classification Of Research



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Quantitative vs Qualitative Methods

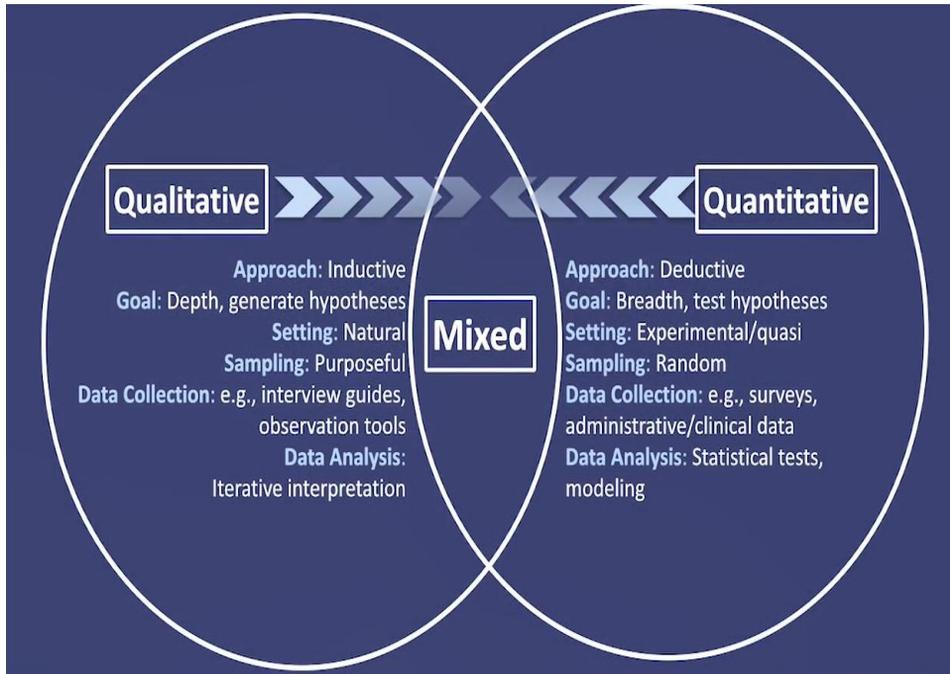
	Qualitative	Quantitative
Conceptual	<p>Concerned with understanding human behaviour from the informant's perspective</p> <p>Assumes a dynamic and negotiated reality</p>	<p>Concerned with discovering facts about social phenomena</p> <p>Assumes a fixed and measurable reality</p>
Methodological	<p>Data are collated through participant observation and interviews</p> <p>Data are analysed by themes from descriptions by informants</p> <p>Data are reported in the language of the informant</p>	<p>Data are collected through measuring variables</p> <p>Data are analysed through numerical comparisons and statistical inferences</p> <p>Data are reported through statistical analysis</p>

Source: Adapted from Minichiello et al. (1990, p. 5)

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Summary

Research Proposal

Research Problem

- Find the topic
- Narrow it down through reading
- Formulate Problem Statement
- Formulate Research Questions

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Research Plan

- Research Design:
 - Empirical/Literary
 - Quantitative
 - Qualitative
- Methodology
- Methods

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Questions?