

MALTHE - Researching Higher Education

SESSION 2 RESEARCH IN THE NORMATIVE PARADIGM

Concepts of research

Anderson (1998, pp. 6-7) defines *educational research* as a systematic "problem-solving activity" for the purpose of "description, explanation, generalization and prediction" - as opposed to "traditional research" in which "hypotheses are derived [and] tested" (see **handout**). He suggests that philosophical or conceptual analysis of "existing literature and theory" constitutes "scholarly activity" but not "research", because of "the lack of primary data".

- Are these useful and valid distinctions?

Anderson (pp. 7, 39) also proposes certain characteristics of educational research and a "good research problem".

- How appropriate are these characteristics?
- In what way do Anderson's definitions and characteristics reflect the "normative" paradigm of research?

According to Anderson (pp. 8-10), "there are essentially four levels at which educational research takes place: descriptive, explanatory, generalization and basic or theoretical" (see table 1.3).

- Are these useful categories for considering the aim and scope of research projects?

Case study (Zhao & Kuh, 2004)

1. Research problem - with reference to the abstract, introduction and statement of purpose:

- What is the research problem?
- What is the researcher's purpose in investigating this problem?

2. Literature review

- What is the purpose of the literature review?
- How does it relate to the research question?

3. Methodology

The research entailed the multivariate analysis¹ of data from an annual national survey of American college students, plus data on SAT/ACT scores (entry tests).

- To what extent does the methodology ensure the reliability and validity of this piece of research? (see also the section on "limitations", pp. 127-130)
- Would it be possible to achieve similar ends using *qualitative* methods?

4. Results

- Why are measurements of correlation and regression so important, in the context of this study? (What are the statistical indicators of "significant" correlation?) (reliability)
- How well are the results tied in with the research question? (validity)

5. Discussion, implications and conclusion (validity)

- Are the conclusions consistent with the results and other evidence?
- Are the practical implications mentioned justified by the findings?

6. General

- Having analysed this study - how far does it conform with Anderson's criteria for educational research and a "good research problem"? What ethical issues does it raise?
- Within which "level of research" would you place it, and why?

¹ Multivariate analysis uses correlations to identify key variables and regressions to identify the strongest relationships among a set of variables.