Case Studies

# Chapter 6: Mixed methodologies: An overview

Students Darren and Gloria will be using a mixed-methods approach for their learning-beyond-registration Masters’ study. Whilst they will both be allocated a university-based research supervisor, they will be lone researchers. They have one calendar year in which to complete their research. Both have acquired university and NHS ethics committee, study-site and gate-keeper approvals.

Gloria’s research question is: *‘what factors influence a first-time mother’s decision to breastfeed?’*

Gloria has decided to collect qualitative data using interviews from newly delivered first-time mothers and quantitative data using questionnaires from community midwives. The mothers and community midwives recruited to the study are linked to one community practice setting/General Practitioner practice. This is where Gloria currently works as a community midwife. Gloria has decided to use the parallel model.

Darren’s research question is: *‘what makes a good clinical practice mentor?’*

Darren has decided to collect qualitative data from students using interviews and quantitative data using questionnaires from experienced mentors based at one hospital setting. This is where Darren currently works as a staff nurse. Darren is going to use the sequential model and will collect the qualitative data first. This will be an exploratory study whereby the data from the interviews will inform the development of the questionnaires to be used in the second phase.

Select one of these scenarios and consider the following:

* What are the benefits and limitations for Gloria/Darren of using a mixed-methods approach?
* What are the advantages and challenges for Gloria/Darren of the particular model that they have chosen to use?\*
* Do you think an alternative model would be better suited to Gloria/Darren’s study? If so, which model would you suggest and why?

**To reveal the answer toggle the show/hide button (¶) or press Control + Shift + 8.**

In any research, the choice of model should be determined by the need to select the model that will best address the study’s aims and objectives. However, practical and logistical challenges may also be influential. The table below outlines some of the advantages and limitations that Gloria and Darren should consider:

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| **Mixed Methods Model** | **Advantages** | **Challenges** |
| Parallel | * Time-efficient and therefore more economical * The appropriate model for use by a team of researchers * The qualitative and quantitative elements have an equal value | * The researcher must have the required skills to carry out quantitative and qualitative elements at the same time * Requires concurrent management of large volumes of data * Merging qualitative and quantitative data sets * Managing the situation when the qualitative and quantitative data present contradictory findings * Challenging for the lone researcher |
| Sequential | * The first phase informs the second * More straightforward and manageable for the lone researcher | * More costly in terms of time and therefore financially * As the second phase is designed based on the findings of the first there may be a delay in developing the second phase * Acquiring research governance approvals may be difficult if aspects of the second phase are unknown at the outset |
| Embedded | * An appropriate model for use by a team of researchers * Can be time-efficient and therefore more economical | * Researcher(s) must be comfortable with the notion that one element (quantitative or qualitative) is secondary to the other * Merging qualitative and quantitative data sets |