

Paradigm Assumptions

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The choice regarding which paradigm (qualitative or quantitative) you choose to inform your study comes with assumptions that affect your study. These assumptions should be explicated in chapter one of your dissertation. The *quantitative researcher* assumes reality is objective and singular, and can be separated from the researcher. Quantitative researchers also assume that their studies can be replicated and that generalizability is possible.

Qualitative researchers assume reality is subjective and multiple as seen by participants in their study. Qualitative researchers assume that research is context bound, but that patterns and theories can be explicated to develop a profound understanding of a situation or phenomenon. The key philosophical assumption of qualitative research, according to Merriam (1997), is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. It is assumed that meaning is embedded in people's experiences, and that this meaning can be mediated through the investigator's own perceptions. The key concern is to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's.

Researchers, who select a mixed-method paradigm, make the assumption that integration of the qualitative and quantitative traditions within the same study can be seen as complementary to each other, especially if the aim of a study is to determine the efficacy of a program, policy, or treatment. This assumption is supported by the research of Greene and Caracelli (2003). Greene and Caracelli contend that underlying the notion of a mixed methods approach is the pragmatic assumption that to judge the value of a social program or policy, or the efficacy of a treatment, an evaluator should employ whatever methods will generate the best supportive evidence to draw conclusions and make decisions.

References

- Greene, J. C., & Caracelli, V. J. (2003). Making paradigmatic sense of mixed methods practice. In A. Tashakkori, & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (pp.91–110). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Merriam, S. B. (1997). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.