A Critical Review Of A Mixed-Methods Design

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Aim

The purpose of this research is to critique notable aspects of an ongoing mixed-method case study. Rudd and Johnson (2010) suggest that the benefits of a mixed-methods design within sport management theory development is linked to enhanced causal explanation; however, "many of the mixed-methods articles uncovered in [their] analysis involved limited or weak use of mixed-methods" (p. 15). Thus, this project serves as an opportunity to highlight (1) difficulties faced with a mixed-methods design, (2) suggestions for methodological improvements during the mixed-methods process, and (3) a reflective discussion of the utility of the mixed-methods approach in the field of sport management.

Literature review

A mixed-method data collection approach was selected for this research that combined both quantitative and qualitative research in a single study. The approach followed a sequential QUANT-QUAL design where the qualitative data was collected to provide interpretation or explanation behind the quantitative data (Creswell, 2003). McKim (2017) posed an important pre-study question for researchers when considering this type of research; "Is mixed methods going to add more value than a single method?" (p. 202). Subsequently, committing to a mixed-methods study means additional time, resources, and expertise required to properly complete the project (McKim, 2007).

In terms of the utility of mixed-methods approaches in sport management, Rudd and Johnson (2010) highlight the benefit of causal explanation when adopting a QUANT-QUAL design. They note this is particularly relevant given the predominance of quantitative methods that leave room for specification error. Further, Creswell and Plano Clark (as cited in McKim, 2017) stated that mixed-methods studies allow the researcher to combat some of the single methodological study weaknesses, and utilize the strengths of both. Further, Hurmerinta-Peltomäki and Nummela (2006) added discussion on the benefits, stating that mixed-methods allow the researcher to both further validate their findings via triangulation, and provide an in-depth exploration of the studied phenomenon. It is important to note that mixed-methods can provide contradictory findings, adding additional work for the researcher to understand the findings; however, it is argued that this leads to more knowledge creation and theoretical contribution in the end (Rudd & Johnson, 2010).

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach. First, pre-post surveys measured internship expectations, experiences, career intentions, and well-being of undergraduate sport management students. Second, semi-structured interviews occurred after the completion of the internships was to determine the nature and influence of stimulus events in the context of undergraduate sport management internship experiences. For reference, stimulus events in this study were notable occurrences that stimulate the student in a positive or negative manner during their internship.

Analysis of the pre-post survey data involved descriptive statistics to summarize and describe the data. Paired sample t-tests were used to determine if there was a difference between the pre- and post-survey mean scores regarding the students' expectations versus their experience, their career intentions, and finally, well-being. Basic coding was completed for the interview data to identify themes around the internship experience and well-being, as well as categorize the type and nature of stimulus events discussed within the internships (Yin, 2014). Triangulation then occurred to determine if the quantitative survey results were in line with the qualitative interview findings.

Results/discussion

The key themes regarding the critique of the mixed-methods design primarily include Hurmerinta-Peltomäki and Nummela's (2006) discussion of contradictory findings within the mixed-methods approach; or simply put, reconciling instance where the data sets do not fully reflect each other (Rudd & Johnson, 2010). Relatedly, an important consideration was theoretically determining which data were weighted more heavily, the quantitative or qualitative data. Additionally, Dodge, Daly, Huyton, and Sanders (2012) stated that well-being is a difficult concept because it is tough to define, and more difficult to measure. This was certainly true within this mixed-methods study, where quantitative and qualitative methods revealed that participant understanding of the concept was challenging at times.

Regarding lessons related to the qualitative method within the mixed-methods approach, knowing when to probe or not probe further with certain participants was an ongoing learning process and was facilitated by the mixed-method design. The quantitative data served as a tool to help probe; however, this was still challenging at times. Lastly, studying an experience that is a crucial step for students' career paths brings up issues around what the student is willing to acknowledge or discuss in detail around the experience. This critique serves Rudd and Johnson's call to highlight the challenges and improve understanding around the mixed-methods design in the field of sport management.

References

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