



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

a step-by-step guide for beginners

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Preface

This book is based upon my experiences in research as a student, practitioner and teacher. The difficulties I faced in understanding research as a student, my discoveries about what was applicable and inapplicable in the field as a practitioner, and my development of the ability effectively to communicate difficult concepts in simple language without sacrificing technicality and accuracy as a teacher have become the basis of this book.

Research methodology is taught as a supporting subject in several ways in many academic disciplines such as health, education, psychology, social work, nursing, public health, library studies and marketing research. The core philosophical base for this book comes from my conviction that, although these disciplines vary in content, their broad approach to a research enquiry is similar. This book, therefore, is addressed to these academic disciplines.

It is true that some disciplines place greater emphasis on quantitative research and some on qualitative research. My own approach to research is a combination of both. Firstly, it is the objective that should decide whether a study be carried out adopting a qualitative or a quantitative approach. Secondly, in real life most research is a combination of both methods. Though they differ in the philosophy that underpins their mode of enquiry, to a great extent their broad approach to enquiry is similar. The quantitative research process is reasonably well structured whereas the qualitative one is fairly unstructured, and these are their respective strengths as well as weaknesses. I strongly believe that both are important to portray a complete picture. In addition, there are aspects of quantitative research that are qualitative in nature. It depends upon how a piece of information has been collected and analysed. Therefore I feel very strongly that a good researcher needs to have both types of skill. I follow a qualitative–quantitative–qualitative approach to an enquiry. This book, therefore, has been written to provide theoretical information in an operational manner about methods, procedures and techniques that are used in both approaches.

Research as a subject is taught at different levels. The book is designed specifically for students who are newcomers to research and who may have a psychological barrier with regard to the subject. I have therefore not assumed any previous knowledge on the part of the reader; I have omitted detailed discussion of aspects that may be inappropriate for beginners; I have used many flow charts and examples to communicate concepts; and

CHAPTER 1

Research: A Way of Thinking

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Some of the reasons for doing research
- How research can be used to gather evidence to inform your practice
- The applications of research
- Characteristics and requirements of the research process
- Types of research from the perspective of applications, objectives and enquiry modes
- Research paradigms

Keywords: *applied research, controlled, correlational research, descriptive research, empirical, explanatory research, exploratory research, evidence-based practice, interpretive paradigm, positivistic paradigm, pure research, qualitative research, quantitative research, reliability, research, structured and unstructured enquiries, systematic, validity.*

Research: an integral part of your practice

Research is undertaken within most professions. More than a set of skills, research is a way of thinking: examining critically the various aspects of your day-to-day professional work; understanding and formulating guiding principles that govern a particular procedure; and developing and testing new theories that contribute to the advancement of your practice and

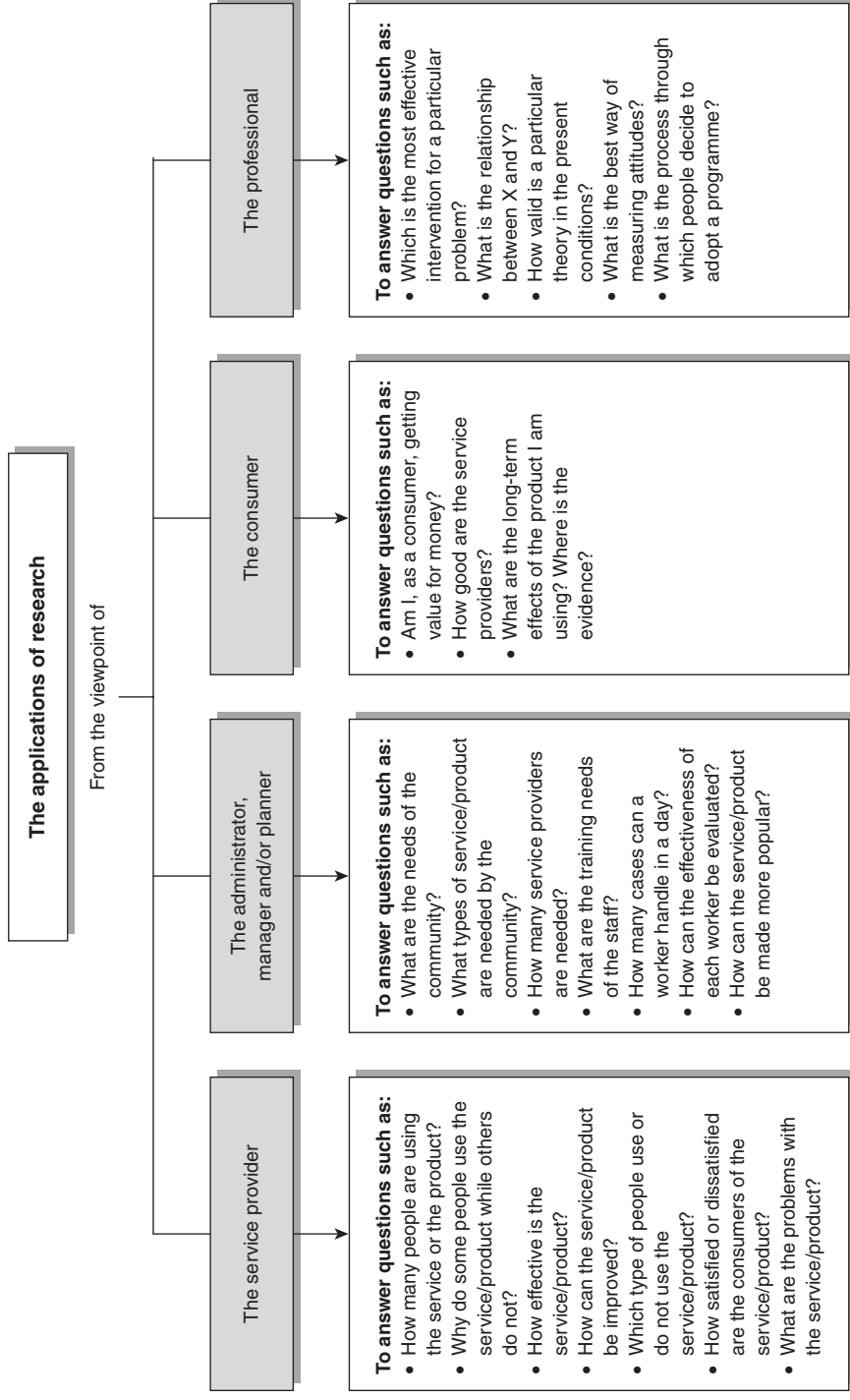


FIGURE 1.1 The applications of research

- **Critical** – Critical scrutiny of the procedures used and the methods employed is crucial to a research enquiry. The process of investigation must be foolproof and free from any drawbacks. The process adopted and the procedures used must be able to withstand critical scrutiny.

For a process to be called research, it is imperative that it has the above characteristics.

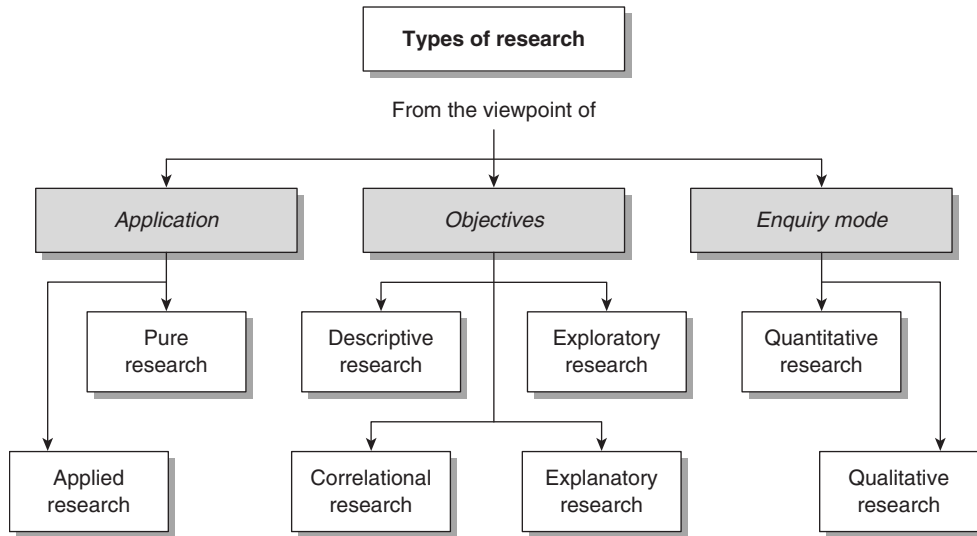


FIGURE 1.2 Types of research

Types of research

Types of research can be looked at from three different perspectives (Figure 1.2):

- 1 *applications* of the findings of the research study;
- 2 *objectives* of the study;
- 3 *mode of enquiry* used in conducting the study.

The classification of the types of a study on the basis of these perspectives is *not* mutually exclusive: that is, a research study classified from the viewpoint of ‘application’ can also be classified from the perspectives of ‘objectives’ and ‘enquiry mode’ employed. For example, a research project may be classified as pure or applied research (from the perspective of application), as descriptive, correlational, explanatory or exploratory (from the perspective of objectives) and as qualitative or quantitative (from the perspective of the enquiry mode employed).