



Mills, G. E., & Gay, L. R. (2016) *Education research: Competencies for analysis and applications*. London, England: Pearson Education.

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Introduction

Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications was first published in 1976 as a 354-page tome when I was barely two years old. The current 11th edition is testament to the book's applicability and relevance, successfully enduring the trial of time; key considerations within which continue to underpin educational research. The authors' intention to write a how-to manual for educational research is clearly evident. This book is the toolbox-that-has-everything which beginning researchers would need and very much appreciate; that the book doubled in size over the past 40 years is neither coincidence nor accident. Indeed, a significant update to the 11th edition is the revision of Chapter 3, Literature Review, to incorporate influences of technology on how literature is curated.

Literature Review: Beyond the Library

The review of related literature is often seen as a necessary evil to be completed as fast as possible so that one can get on with the "real research." This perspective reflects a lack of understanding of the purposes and importance of the review and a feeling of uneasiness on the part of the students who are not sure how to report the literature (107).

The Literature Review has constantly baffled beginning researchers, especially the purpose and scope of the review, hence the choice of literature. More often than not, the researcher loses his or her voice and erroneously takes on the role of a reporter and merely repeats what has been said (after paraphrasing of course).

The literature review begins with identifying and locating relevant documents bearing trustworthy information related to the research problem. In this regard, the provision of search strategies for library catalogues and the Internet in the 11th edition is a useful companion on the search adventure. It comes complete with, step-by-step guidance

of searching the ERIC database, fully illustrated with the aid of screenshots, as well as, suggestions of handbooks, go-to databases, websites, and professional organisations. However, the recommendations seem rather US-biased. Personally I find that there is a noticeable difference in the sensibilities of researchers from both sides of the Atlantic pond and wonder if these recommendations will skew beginning researchers' perspectives of educational research.

A Potential Bias?

A case-in-point on the difference in sensibility can be found in Chapter 10 – Experimental Research, which incidentally is significantly revised "to reflect 21st Century discussions" in the 11th edition (5). The general consensus in the United Kingdom is to exercise extreme caution when setting up experimental research to the point of avoidance. Indeed the British Educational Research Association (BERA) is explicit in its charge to researchers in its published Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011):

Researchers must take steps to minimise the effects of designs that advantage or are perceived to advantage one group of participants over others e.g. in an experimental or quasi-experimental study in which the treatment is viewed as a desirable intervention and which by definition is not available to the control or comparison group respectively.

- BERA, 2011, p. 10

My own experience working with colleagues from the U.K. is also reflective of this position. Minimising advantage to a group of students is counterproductive in the experimental setup because the driving motivation for doing so is precisely to prove that one method/intervention is advantageous over the other and "establish cause-effect relations" (286). How might one then begin to minimise the advantage that one group of students may potentially gain without distorting the findings and yielding no results from the study? Conversely,

In experimental research, the researcher manipulates at least one independent variable, controls other relevant variables, and observes the effect on one or more variables. The researcher determines who gets what; that is, the researcher has control over the selection and assignment of groups to treatments (286).

I have found too from my experience working with colleagues from the U.S. that randomised control trial is deemed necessary for yielding valid evidence to conclude on the efficacy of intervention/treatment. Perhaps it is then not surprising that the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Code of Ethics (2011) is devoid of its British counterpart's warning about the application of experimental research.

Indeed in the discussion of Ethics in Chapter 1, Mills and Gay devoted a significant portion of the section to "Ethical Issues Unique to Qualitative Research" (39). In this section, they claimed that "some features of qualitative research raise additional issues not typically encountered in quantitative research." Further into the section, Mills and Gay then charged qualitative researchers "to convey with confidence that research participants will not suffer harm as the result of their involvement in the research effort" (41). How might potential harm be unique to qualitative study?

Nevertheless, the perceived U.S.-bias aside, this is a handy book that I wish I had when I was writing up my research plan and dissertation many eons ago.

The Rest of the Tool-Box

As mentioned earlier, this book is a well-stocked toolbox that researchers, especially beginning ones, will find useful. It begins with delineating the research process before

expounding on the design, data, and writing. If putting together a research piece is akin to building a house, Educational Research provides the how-to, templates of building plans (10 in all!), tools, and even the paint for the exterior walls.

Despite the wealth of content, it is not immediately clear if students, who are about to embark on an educational research journey, would be enabled to answer the most fundamental question – what good would emerge from my study? In highlighting theories, personal experiences, previous studies that can be replicated, and library searches as the four main sources of research problems, it is unclear if Mills and Gay are challenging their readers to put a dent in the educational universe or providing them with yet another tool to progress towards that dreaded assignment deadline.

Now, if only there were an app for this book.

References

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