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A Book Review on Research Methods in Education (8th edition)

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A Book Review on *Research Methods in Education* (8th edition)

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Reference: Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research methods in education (8th ed.)*. London: Routledge.

Introduction

Research Methods in Education should be no stranger to educational and social researchers. The book was first published in 1980, and since then it has been widely recommended by scholars worldwide as an excellent manual for researchers to plan, conduct, report and evaluate research projects. Like former editions, this updated, expanded, and revised 8th edition, published in 2017, continues to be favorably received worldwide as it covers a wide range of topics discussed in great detail, focusing on current educational issues and controversies.

Summary of content

The book is well-structured into five parts and 45 chapters, which covers almost all issues related to educational research at all stages. **Part 1** mainly discuss the context of education research, beginning with a rigorous explanation of the nature of enquiry in an educational context. **Part 2** begins with a relevant discussion on ethics in research and other aspects which must be considered before actual research commences, including research planning, research questions, research design, sampling, reliability, validity and “sensitive” educational research. **Part 3** covers major research methodologies, namely quantitative, qualitative and mixed research methods. Separate chapters then provide extended analysis of ethnographic research, surveys, case studies, experiments, action research and netnography, illustrated with relevant examples and practical advice. **Part 4** presents an updated and comprehensive analysis of the diverse instruments for collecting data, including questionnaires, interviews, observations, tests, secondary data, personal constructs, role-play and visual media. **Part 5** is devoted to data analysis and reporting, both quantitative and qualitative, particularly how to code and explore discourses and visual media, how to use statistics and select statistical tools for analyzing and presenting data.

Strengths

The book has a lot of strengths:

The book covers the whole range of issues involved in educational research, including the context of educational research, research design, research methodologies, data collection methods, data analysis and presentation with strong links to their relevance in educational research, and it maps specific methods to associated methodologies or paradigms. The book

is well-grounded in theory; however, it also offers educational researchers plentiful and rich practical advice.

Moreover, the book is well laid out structurally and accessible thanks to the extensive use of illustrations and examples, making the material easily applicable to one's own context. In addition, the book adopts a systematic writing style with realistic views, encouraging the reader to continue.

Besides raising key issues, the authors have thoroughly updated the eighth edition and devoted more discussion on current developments, contemporary issues and controversies, and the increasingly sophisticated issues in educational research. These issues include mixed methods, theoretical frameworks, ethics, virtual worlds, social media, ethnography, secondary data, statistical significance, effect size and statistical power, etc.

Another distinctive feature of the book is its neutral or unbiased tone. Throughout the book, the authors seek not to marginalize one approach or method over another. Instead, the authors focus on the fit between the research purposes, the data collection strategies and the methods required.

Finally, the book is supported by an interactive companion website which offers a wealth of supplementary online materials, summaries of each chapter on PowerPoint slides, making them ideal for use by both lecturers and students. The website also offers SPSS and QSR NVivo data sets for practice, downloadable statistical tables, together with a training programme in research methods. These materials are indicated in the book with links to the website www.routledge.com/cw/cohen.

Contrast with Similar Works

Comparing with other books on research methods, "Research Methods in Education" offers a broad overview of various methodologies and their applications in the context of education. It digs deeper into specific research paradigms and advanced techniques, offering extensive discussions on theoretical frameworks and complex methodologies. In addition, it balances qualitative and quantitative perspectives, presenting a more generalist view. Finally, it provides a more hands-on, step-by-step guide for researchers at all levels." These features highlight how the book situates itself within the broader academic discourse, offering a unique blend of methodological breadth and practical insight that distinguishes it from its counterparts.

Limitations

However, there are several shortcomings that are worth noting. The book is a bit lengthy, thick and heavy, so it is quite hard to handle the hard copy, and it may take a long time to finish reading; however, I believe that this book is not designed for reading at one time, but for using and referring to when necessary during the whole research process since almost

all the issues are discussed in detail. Therefore, this book is not suitable for beginning researchers as all the contents are presented in a wordy and highly academic manner. Readers should have basic knowledge of research for better understanding of this book. I wish it could have been written in a more concise and simple manner with key concepts explained more briefly and clearly. For instance, the discussion on *The nature of enquiry: setting the field* in Part 1, right at the beginning of the book, is quite lengthy and wordy with a lot of theoretical concepts. This section elaborates on topics such as *the search for understanding, conceptions of social reality, paradigms, positivism, post-positivism, and postmodernism and post-structuralist perspectives*. The presentation of these complex ideas may be discouraging for those new to research. The intricate language and the depth of theoretical details require a strong background in educational theory and philosophy to fully understand the content, which might not be accessible for beginners.

Stylistic Enhancements

To improve the readability and practical use of "Research Methods in Education," I would like to suggest several stylistic enhancements. Firstly, the authors could divide the book into multiple volumes tailored to different levels of expertise to enhance its accessibility. An introductory volume could address foundational concepts for beginners, an intermediate volume could elaborate on more complex methodologies for experienced researchers, and an advanced volume could address complex techniques and theories for experts. This structure would allow readers to engage with content appropriate to their level of understanding and interest. It also helps reduce the weight and thickness of the book, making it more user-friendly. In addition to this structural adjustment, the authors could insert more visual aids, such as mind maps, charts, diagrams, and tables to help clarify complex concepts and methodologies. For instance, flowcharts could illustrate research processes, and tables could compare different qualitative and quantitative methods, making the material easier to follow.

Reader Recommendations

I would like to recommend this book to students, teachers, researchers and anyone who is involved in social and educational research at all levels of experience. While it offers a comprehensive and detailed background for novice researchers, there are extensive discussions on emerging issues for well-established researchers. I highly recommend the book as the main course book for graduate research method courses, and I believe that the library of any educational institution should keep copies of this highly regarded book.

For beginners, I suggest that they should start with foundational chapters that provide a clear introduction and practical guidance. Particularly, they should begin with Chapter 1 "Introduction to Educational Research," which offers an overview of the field and its significance. Chapter 3 "Reviewing the Literature" is also essential as it explains how to conduct a literature review, a very important step in any research project. Chapter 9

"Choosing a Research Project" provides practical advice on selecting a feasible and meaningful research topic. Chapter 10 "Research Questions" is also important for understanding how to formulate and refine research questions effectively. Chapter 7 "The Ethics of Educational and Social Research" covers essential ethical considerations that are crucial for any research works. These chapters collectively provide a basic foundation for new researchers in the field of educational research, making more complex topics easier to approach later on.

For more experienced researchers, "Research Methods in Education" offers a lot of advanced insights and comprehensive coverage of both established and emerging methodologies. For example, chapters on mixed-methods research, advanced statistical techniques, and longitudinal studies are particularly valuable. These sections elaborate on the complexities of research design like longitudinal or experimental designs with multiple variables and advanced statistical techniques such as Multiple Regression Analysis and Factor Analysis, providing detailed discussions that go beyond the basics and explore nuanced aspects of methodological application. By engaging with these advanced chapters, experienced researchers can refine their methodological approaches, stay updated with current trends, and enhance their overall research competence.

Personal Reflections

As a post-graduate student, I find this book most relevant and important to my research methods for my PhD. thesis, and it has become my personal favorite research methods book. It guides me through the complexity of the research process from conceptualization to presentation. The section I like most is the detailed discussion on the nature of inquiry which at first seems to be lengthy, but actually it triggers researchers to think carefully why to do research. This discussion helps us avoid getting into the research process too early without mastering the nature of the quest for knowledge.

The book then continues introducing research paradigms, naturalistic and interpretive methodologies, post-positivism, post-structuralism, postmodernism and complexity theory, which I am especially supportive of as I believe they have emerged as essential components of educational research. Throughout the book, I can see that educational research is ever-growing with greater diversity of topics, paradigms, theories, methods and data sources; therefore, any research project needs to be thoroughly considered with the principle: different research purposes require different research paradigms and methods.

Moreover, its clear explanations of complex concepts like mixed-methods research, case study design have provided me with the tools necessary to approach my research with confidence and precision. The breadth of topics covered has also allowed me to explore various methodologies before selecting the most appropriate one for my thesis. The detailed discussions on sampling techniques, data collection methods and advanced statistical

techniques equipped me with the knowledge to design a study that is both rigorous and reflective of the research questions at hand.

I particularly appreciate how the authors balance theoretical concepts with practical applications, offering concrete examples and case studies that have provided me with a clear understanding of how to implement these methods in my own research. Whenever I faced challenges in the research process—whether in refining my research questions or interpreting complex data—the book provided not just solutions but also the reassurance that I was on the right path. This has made "Research Methods in Education" more than just a resource; it has become a companion in my research journey.