

The Process of Conducting Research Using Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

What is research? Research is a process in which you engage in a small set of logical steps to understand a topic or issue. In this chapter, I define research, discuss why it is important, advance six steps for conducting research, and identify how you can conduct research ethically by employing skills that you already have. You can approach research in two ways—through a quantitative study or a qualitative study—depending on the type of problem you need to research. Your choice of one of these approaches will shape the procedures you use in each of the six steps of research. In this chapter, I explore the many ways these two approaches are similar and different.

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define and describe the importance of educational research.
- Describe the six steps in the process of research.
- Identify the characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research in the six steps.
- Identify the type of research designs associated with quantitative and qualitative research.
- Discuss important ethical issues in conducting research.
- Recognize skills needed to design and conduct research.

To begin, consider Maria, a teacher with 10 years of experience who teaches English at a midsize metropolitan high school. Lately, a number of incidents in the school district have involved students possessing weapons:

- A teacher found a 10th grader hiding a knife in his locker.
- A 12th-grade student threatened another student, telling him “he wouldn’t see the light of day” unless he stopped harassing her.
- At a nearby high school, a student pointed a handgun at another student outside the school.

These incidents alarm district officials, school administrators, and teachers. The principal forms a committee made up of administrators and teachers to develop guidelines about how the school should respond to these situations. In response to a call for teachers to serve on this committee, Maria volunteers immediately.

Maria sees the school committee assignment and her graduate program's research study requirement as mutual opportunities to research school violence and weapon possession and to have a positive impact on her school. Where does she begin?

Maria's situation of balancing the dual roles of professional and graduate student may be familiar to you. Let's assess her present research situation:

- Maria recognizes the need to closely examine an important issue—school violence and weapons at school—although she is new to research. However, she is not a stranger to looking up topics in libraries or to searching the Internet when she has a question about something. She has occasionally looked at a few research journals, such as the *High School Journal*, the *Journal of Educational Research*, and *Theory Into Practice*, in her school library, and she has overheard other teachers talking about research studies on the subject of school violence. Although she has no research background, she expects that research will yield important findings for her school committee and also help her fulfill the requirement to conduct a small-scale research study for her graduate degree.
- To complete the required research for her graduate program, Maria must overcome her fears about planning and conducting a study. To do this, she needs to think about research not as a large, formidable task, but rather as a series of small, manageable steps. Knowing these smaller steps is key to the success of planning and completing her research.

Your situation may be similar to Maria's. At this stage, your concerns may start with the question "What is research?"

A DEFINITION OF RESEARCH AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Research is a process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue. At a general level, research consists of three steps:

1. Pose a question
2. Collect data to answer the question
3. Present an answer to the question

This should be a familiar process. You engage in solving problems every day, and you start with a question, collect some information, and then form an answer. Although there are a few more steps in research than these three, this is the overall framework for research. When you examine a published study or conduct your own study, you will find these three parts as the core elements.

Not all individuals in education fields have an understanding and appreciation of research. For some, research may seem like something that is important only for faculty members in colleges and universities. Although it is true that college and university faculty members value and conduct research, personnel in other educational settings, such as school psychologists, principals, school board members, adult educators, college administrators, and graduate students, also read and use research. Research is important for three reasons.

Research Adds to Our Knowledge

Educators strive for continual improvement. This requires addressing problems or issues and searching for potential solutions. **Adding to knowledge** means that educators undertake research to contribute to existing information about issues. We are all aware of pressing educational issues being debated today, such as the integration of AIDS education into the school curriculum.

Research plays a vital role in addressing these issues. Through research, we develop results that help answer questions, and as we accumulate these results, we gain a deeper understanding of the problems. In this way, researchers are much like bricklayers who build a wall brick by brick, continually adding to the wall and, in the process, creating a stronger structure.

How can research specifically add to the knowledge base and existing literature? A research report might provide a study that has not been conducted and thereby fill a void in existing knowledge. It can also provide additional results to confirm or disconfirm results of prior studies. It can help add to the literature about practices that work or advance better practices that educators might try in their educational setting. It can provide information about people and places that have not been previously studied.

Suppose that you decide to research how elementary schoolchildren learn social skills. If you study how children develop social skills and past research has not examined this topic, your research study addresses a gap in knowledge. If your study explores how African American children use social skills on their way home from school, your study might replicate past studies but would test results with new participants at a different research site. If your study examines how children use social skills when at play, not on the school grounds but on the way home from school, the study would contribute to knowledge by expanding our understanding of the topic. If your study examines female children on the way home from school, your study would add female voices seldom heard in the research. If your study has implications for how to teach social skills to students, it has practical value.

Research Improves Practice

Research is also important because it *suggests improvements* for practice. Armed with research results, teachers and other educators become more effective professionals. This effectiveness translates into better learning for kids. For instance, through research, personnel involved in teacher education programs in schools of education know much more about training teachers today than they did 20 years ago. Zeichner (1999) summarized the impact of research on teacher training during this period (see Table 1.1). Teacher trainers today know more about the academic capabilities of students, the characteristics of good teacher training programs, the recurring practices in teacher training programs, the need to challenge student beliefs and worldviews, and the tensions teacher educators face in their institutions. However, before these research results can impact teacher training or any other aspect of education, individuals in educational settings need to be aware of results from investigations, to know how to read research studies, to locate useful conclusions from them, and to apply the findings to their own unique situations. Educators using research may be teachers in preschool through grade 12, superintendents in school district offices, school psychologists working with children with behavioral problems, or adult educators who teach English as a second language. Research may help these individuals improve their practices on the job.

Research offers practicing educators *new ideas* to consider as they go about their jobs. From reading research studies, educators can learn about new practices that have been tried in other settings or situations. For example, the adult educator working with immigrants may find that small-group interaction that focuses on using cultural objects from the various homelands may increase the rate at which immigrants learn the English language.

TABLE 1.1

Zeichner's (1999) Summary of Major Research Results in Teacher Education

Research Conducted	What Researchers Have Learned
Surveys about students in teacher education programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From academic, social class, racial, ethnic, and gender characteristics of both teacher educators and their students, the research has challenged the misconception that students who go into teaching are academically inferior to those who go into other fields. • Despite changing U.S. demographics, teacher education programs admit mostly students who are white, monolingual English speakers.
Specific case studies of individual teacher education programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful teacher education programs have a coherent vision of good teaching and close links to local schools. • Researchers need to spend time living in teacher education programs to understand them.
Conceptual and historical research on teacher education programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher education programs differ in their approaches, such as the importance of disciplinary knowledge versus students learning versus critiquing societal inequalities in schooling practices. • Programs throughout the 20th century have emphasized recurring practices such as performance-based teacher education.
Studies of learning to teach in different settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is difficult to change the tacit beliefs, understandings, and worldviews that students bring to teacher education programs. • The impact of a program on students can be increased through cohort groups, portfolio development, case studies, and narratives in which they examine their beliefs.
Nature and impact of teacher education activities and self-studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite the sometimes unfavorable structural conditions of teacher educators' work, their voices are being heard. • Teachers, in these self-studies, describe the tensions and contradictions involved in being a teacher educator.

Research also helps practitioners *evaluate approaches* that they hope will work with individuals in educational settings. This process involves sifting through research to determine which results will be most useful. This process is demonstrated in Figure 1.1, which focuses on three steps that a classroom teacher might use (Connelly, Dukacz, & Quinlan, 1980). As shown in Figure 1.1, a teacher first decides what needs to be implemented in the classroom, then examines alternative lines of research, and finally decides which line of research might help accomplish what needs to be done.

For example, a reading teacher decides to incorporate more information about cultural perspectives into the classroom. Research suggests that this may be done with classroom interactions by inviting speakers to the room (line A) or by having the children consider and think (cognitively) about different cultural perspectives by talking with individuals at a local cultural center (line B). It may also be accomplished by having the children inquire into cultural messages embedded within advertisements (line C) or identify the cultural subject matter of speeches of famous Americans (line D). A line of research is then chosen that helps the teacher accomplish classroom goals. This teacher might be Maria, our teacher conducting research on weapon possession in schools and its potential for violence. Maria hopes to present options for dealing with this issue to her committee and needs to identify useful research lines and consider approaches taken by other schools.

At a broader level, research helps the practicing educator *build connections* with other educators who are trying out similar ideas in different locations. Special education teachers, for example, may establish connections at research conferences, where individuals report on topics of mutual interest, such as using small-group strategies for discipline management in classrooms.

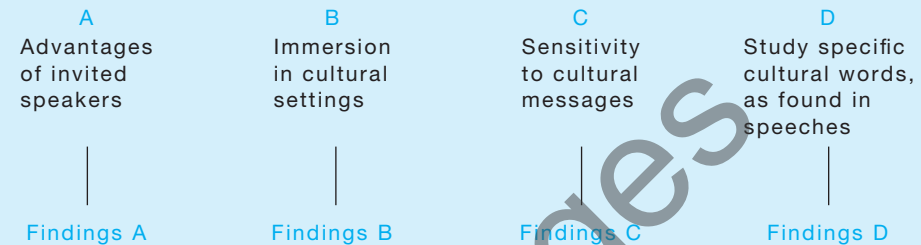
FIGURE 1.1**Lines of Research and Your Decision Making**

Step 1. Decide what you want to do in your classroom (e.g., incorporate more information about cultural perspectives in the classroom).



Step 2. Find out what research has to say.

Research Lines



Step 3. Decide which of the lines of research might help you do the things you want to do in your classroom.

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Figure 1, "Lines of research and your decision-making," (p. 29) from *Curriculum Planning for the Classroom*, edited by F. Michael Connelly, Albert S. Dukacz and Frank Quinlan, © Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1980, University of Toronto Press.

Research Informs Policy Debates

In addition to potentially helping educators become better practitioners, research also provides information to policymakers when they research and debate educational topics. Policymakers may range from federal government employees and state workers to local school board members and administrators, and they discuss and take positions on educational issues important to constituencies. For these individuals, research offers results that can help them weigh various perspectives. When policymakers read research on issues, they become informed about current debates and stances taken by other public officials. To be useful, research needs to have clear results, be summarized in a concise fashion, and include data-based evidence. For example, research useful to policymakers might summarize the alternatives on the following:

- Welfare and its effect on children's schooling among lower-income families
- School choice and the arguments proposed by opponents and proponents

Several Problems with Research Today

Despite the importance of research, we need to realistically evaluate its contributions. Sometimes the results show contradictory or vague findings. An education aide to the Education and Labor Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives for 27 years expressed this confusion: "I read through every single evaluation . . . looking for a hard sentence—a declarative sentence—something that I could put into the legislation, and there were very few" (Viadero, 1999, p. 36). Not only are policymakers looking for a clear "declarative sentence," but many readers of educational research search for some

evidence that makes a direct statement about an educational issue. On balance, however, research accumulates slowly, and what may seem contradictory comes together to make sense in time. Based on the information known, for example, it took more than 4 years to identify the most rudimentary factors about how chairpersons help faculty become better researchers (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990).

Another problem with research is the issue of questionable data. The author of a particular research report may not have gathered information from people who are able to understand and address the problem. The number of participants may also be dismally low, which can cause problems in drawing appropriate statistical conclusions. The survey used in a study may contain questions that are ambiguous and vague. At a technical level, the researcher may have chosen an inappropriate statistic for analyzing the data. Just because research is published in a well-known journal does not automatically make it “good” research.

To these issues, we could add unclear statements about the intent of the study, the lack of full disclosure of data collection procedures, or vague statements of the research problem that drives the inquiry. Research has limits, and you need to know how to decipher research studies because researchers may not write them as clearly and accurately as you would like. We cannot erase all “poor” research reported in the educational field. We can, however, as responsible inquirers, seek to reconcile different findings and employ sound procedures to collect and analyze data and to provide clear direction for our own research.

MyLab Education [Self-Check 1.1](#)

MyLab Education [Application Exercise 1.1](#): Evaluating Research Articles Part 1

THE SIX STEPS IN THE PROCESS OF RESEARCH

When researchers conduct a study, they proceed through a distinct set of steps. Years ago, these steps were identified as the “scientific method” of inquiry (Kerlinger, 1972; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Using a “scientific method,” researchers do the following:

- Identify a problem that defines the goal of research
- Make a prediction that, if confirmed, resolves the problem
- Gather data relevant to this prediction
- Analyze and interpret the data to see if it supports the prediction and resolves the question that initiated the research

Applied today, these steps provide the foundation for educational research. Although not all studies include predictions, you engage in these steps whenever you undertake a research study. As shown in Figure 1.2, the **process of research** consists of six steps:

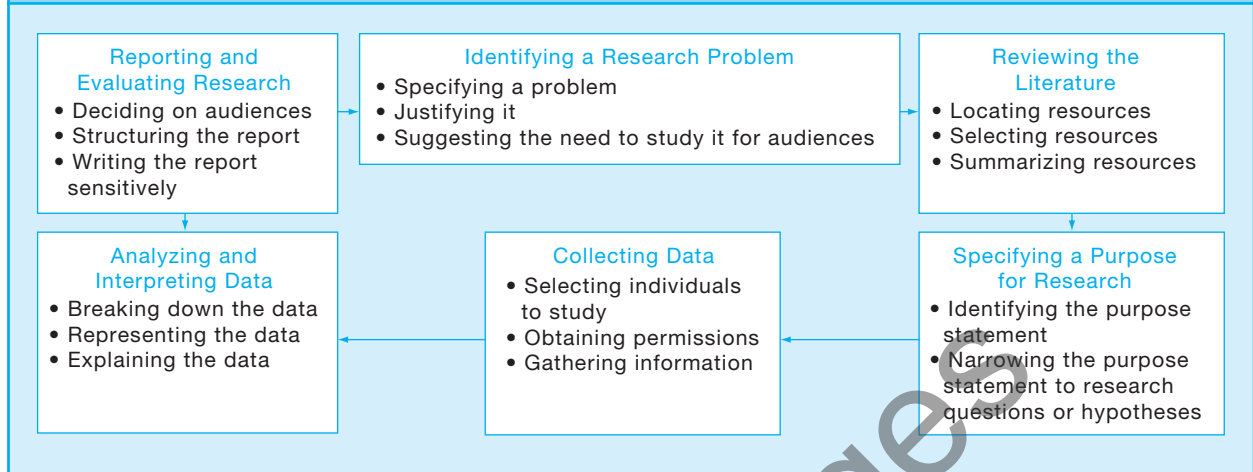
1. Identifying a research problem
2. Reviewing the literature
3. Specifying a purpose for research
4. Collecting data
5. Analyzing and interpreting the data
6. Reporting and evaluating research

Identifying a Research Problem

You begin a research study by identifying a topic to study—typically an issue or problem in education that needs to be resolved. **Identifying a research problem** consists of specifying an issue to study, developing a justification for studying it, and suggesting

FIGURE 1.2

The Research Process Cycle



the importance of the study for select audiences that will read the report. By specifying a “problem,” you limit the subject matter and focus attention on a specific aspect of study. Consider the following “problems,” each of which merits research:

- Teens are not learning how to connect to others in their communities.
- Teenage smoking will lead to many premature deaths.

These needs, issues, or controversies arise out of an educational need expressed by teachers, schools, policymakers, or researchers, and we refer to them as *research problems*. You will state them in introductory sections of a research report and provide a rationale for their importance. In a formal sense, these problems are part of a larger written section called the “statement of the problem,” and this section includes the topic, the problem, a justification for the problem, and the importance of studying it for specific audiences, such as teachers, administrators, or researchers.

Let’s examine Maria’s research to see how she will specify her study’s research problem.

Maria plans to study school violence and weapon possession in schools. She starts with a problem: escalating weapon possession among students in high schools.

She needs to justify the problem by providing evidence about the importance of this problem and documenting how her study will provide new insight into the problem.

In her research, Marie will need to identify and justify the research problem that she is studying.

Reviewing the Literature

It is important to know who has studied the research problem you plan to examine. You may fear that you will initiate and conduct a study that merely replicates prior research. However, faculty and advisers often fear that you will plan a study that does not build on existing knowledge and does not add to the accumulation of findings on a topic. Because of these concerns, reviewing the literature is an important step in the research process. **Reviewing the literature** means locating summaries, books, journals, and

indexed publications on a topic; selectively choosing which literature to include in your review; synthesizing the literature and then summarizing the literature in a written report.

The skills required for reviewing the literature develop over time and with practice. You can learn how to locate journal articles and books through an academic library's computerized databases, choose and evaluate the quality of research on your topic, and summarize it in a review. The summary is not reporting articles one by one but identifying the key ideas across the related body of literature. Library resources can be overwhelming, so having a strategy for searching the literature and writing the review is important. Let's examine Maria's approach to reviewing the literature.

To inform her committee about the latest literature on school violence and to plan her own research, Maria needs to conduct a literature review. This process will involve becoming familiar with the university library resources, spending time reviewing literature databases, and making decisions about what literature to use, and writing a formal summary of the literature on school violence. She consults the electronic catalog at her university and plans to search the computerized databases.

In order to review the literature, Maria will need to become familiar with the literature and work with her university library website. Most universities have librarians and information experts who can guide your search.

Specifying a Purpose for Research

If your research problem covers a broad topic of concern, you need to focus it so that you can study it. A focused restatement of the problem is the *purpose statement*. This statement conveys the overall objective or intent of your research. As such, it is the most important statement in your research study. It introduces the entire study, signals the procedures you will use to collect data, and indicates the types of results you hope to find.

The **purpose for research** consists of identifying the major intent or objective for a study and narrowing it into specific research questions or hypotheses. The purpose statement contains the major focus of the study, the participants in the study, and the location or site of the inquiry. This purpose statement is then narrowed to research questions or predictions (called hypotheses) that you plan to answer in your research study. Let's check again with Maria to see how she will write a purpose statement and research questions.

Maria now needs to write down the purpose of her study and formulate the questions she will ask of the individuals selected for her study. In draft after draft, she sketches this purpose statement, recognizing that it will provide major direction for her study and help keep her focused on the primary aim of her study. From this broad purpose, Maria now needs to narrow her study to specific questions or statements that she would like her participants to answer.

Maria will need to write a good purpose statement and the research questions for her study.

Collecting Data

Evidence helps provide answers to your research questions and hypotheses. To get these answers, you engage in the step of collecting or gathering data. **Collecting data** means identifying and selecting individuals for a study, obtaining their permission to study them, and gathering information by asking people questions or observing their behaviors. Of paramount concern in this process is the need to obtain accurate data from individuals and places. This step will produce a collection of numbers (test scores or frequency of

behaviors) or words (responses, opinions, or quotes). Once you identify these individuals and places, you write *method* or *procedure sections* into your research studies. These sections offer detailed, technical discussions about the mechanics and administration of data collection. Many decisions, however, go into creating a good data collection procedure. Let's see how Maria will address data collection.

At this point in the research process, Maria needs to think about where she will conduct her study of school violence and weapon possession, who will participate in the study, how she will obtain permission to study them, what data she will collect, and how she will gather the data. She needs to decide whether she will have students fill out forms or talk to them directly to gather data to answer her research questions. Whichever course she chooses, she will need permission from the high school students and, because the students are minors, from their parents.

Maria will engage in the steps of data collection to gather the data she needs to address her research questions.

Analyzing and Interpreting the Data

During or immediately after data collection, you need to make sense of the information supplied by individuals in the study. Analysis consists of “taking the data apart” to determine individual responses and then “putting it together” to summarize it. **Analyzing and interpreting the data** involve drawing conclusions about it; representing it in tables, figures, and pictures to summarize it; and explaining the conclusions in words to provide answers to your research questions. You report analysis and interpretation in sections of a research report usually titled “Results,” “Findings,” or “Discussion.” How will Maria analyze and interpret the data in her research?

If Maria collects information on a written questionnaire from students across the school district, she will need to enter the questionnaire responses into a computer program, choose a statistical procedure, conduct the analyses, report the results in tables, and draw conclusions about (or interpret) whether the data confirms or disconfirms her expected trends or predictions. If she conducts face-to-face interviews, she will collect audio recordings of students talking about weapon possession at school and transcribe these recordings to obtain text. With her transcripts, she will engage in making sense of student comments by selecting specific sentences and paragraphs and by identifying themes of information. From these themes, she will interpret the meaning of student comments in light of her own personal stance and the suggestions found in past studies.

For help in the data analysis and interpretation phase of her study, Maria will need to analyze her data and make an interpretation to answer her research questions.

Reporting and Evaluating Research

After conducting your research, you will develop a written report and distribute it to select audiences (such as fellow teachers, administrators, parents, or students) that can use your information. **Reporting research** involves deciding on audiences, structuring the report in a format acceptable to these audiences, and then writing the report in a manner that is sensitive to all readers. The audiences for research will vary and will include academic researchers who contribute and read journal articles, faculty advisers and committees that review master's theses and dissertations, and personnel in educational agencies and school districts who look for reports of research on timely topics.

Your structure for the research report will vary for each audience, from a formal format for theses and dissertations to a more informal document for internal reports. In all types of reports, however, researchers need to be respectful and avoid language that discriminates on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, race, or ethnic group.

The audience for your report will have its own standards for judging the quality and utility of the research. **Evaluating research** involves assessing the quality of a study using standards advanced by individuals in education. Unfortunately, there are no ironclad standards for evaluating educational research in the academic research community, in school districts, or in local, state, or federal agencies. Still, we need some means of determining the quality of studies, especially published research or reports presented to practitioner audiences. Let's look at how Maria thinks about organizing her research report.

Maria thinks about how she will organize her final report to her school committee and to her university graduate committee. Her graduate committee likely has a structure in mind for her graduate research study, and she needs to consult her faculty adviser about the format that students typically use. She should have a general idea about what the major sections of the study will be, but the contents of the specific paragraphs and ideas will take shape as her data analysis and interpretation progress.

Her school report will likely be different from her research report. The school report will be informative and concise, will offer recommendations, and will include minimal discussions about methods and procedures. Whatever the audience and structure for her report, it must be respectful of the audience and be devoid of discriminatory language.

Maria will need to organize and report her research in ways suitable for different audiences.

MyLab Education [Self-Check 1.2](#)

MyLab Education [Application Exercise 1.2: Understanding Concepts](#)

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN EACH OF THE SIX STEPS

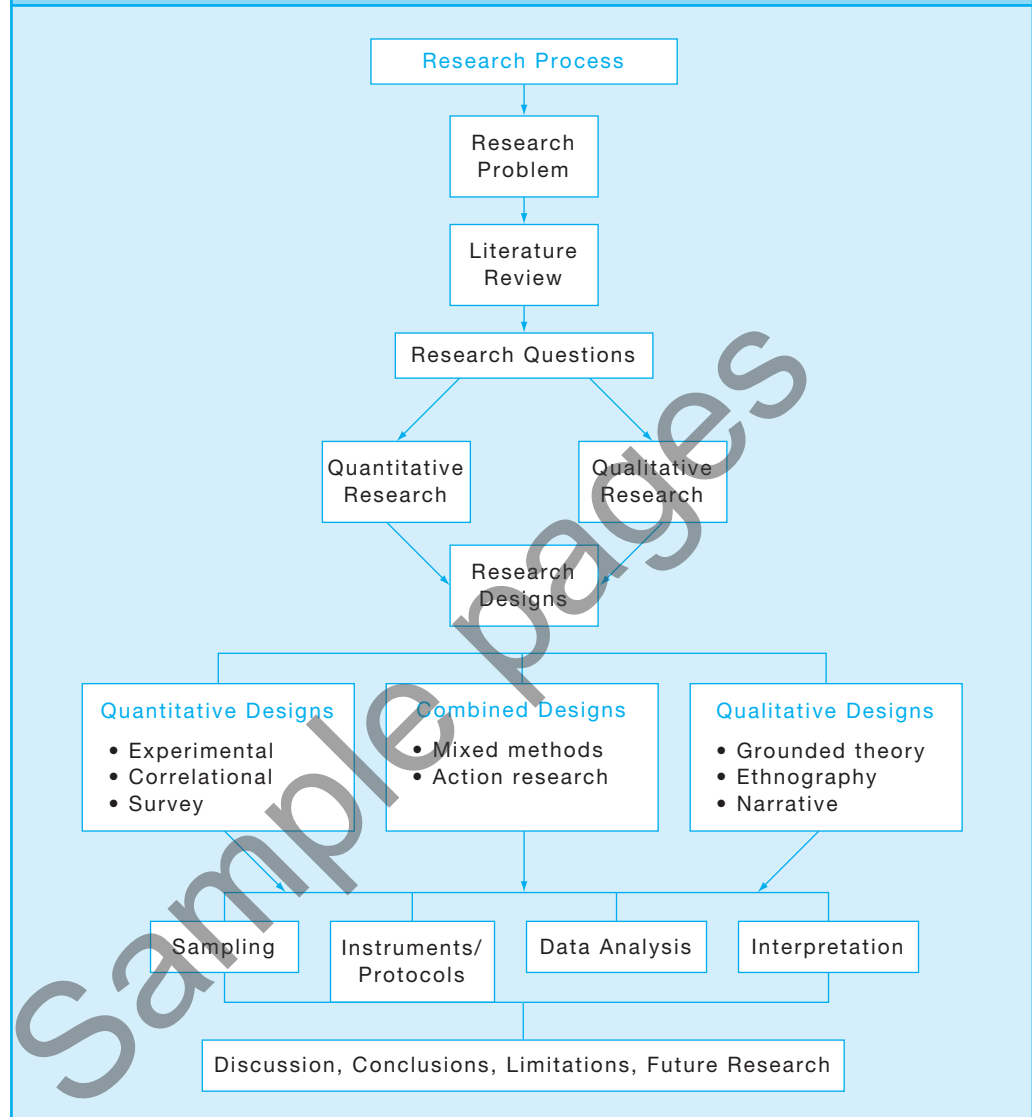
Conducting educational research is more than engaging in the major steps in the process of research. It also includes designing and writing the research in one of the two major tracks: quantitative research or qualitative research. The way that this unfolds is illustrated in the flow of the research process, as shown in Figure 1.3.

Based on the nature of the research problem and the questions that will be asked to address the problem (and accompanying review of the literature that establishes the importance of the problem), the researcher chooses either the quantitative or the qualitative research track. The problem, the questions, and the literature reviews help steer the researcher toward either the quantitative or the qualitative track. These, in turn, inform the specific research design to be used and the procedures involved in them, such as sample selection, data collection instruments or protocols, the procedures, the data analysis, and the final interpretation of results.

What are the characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research tracks at each step in this research process? As each characteristic is discussed, it is helpful to first examine two sample journal articles at the end of this chapter because these articles will be cited with illustrations for each characteristic. Marginal notes have been inserted into the articles to identify the specific passage containing the quantitative and qualitative

FIGURE 1.3

Flow of the Research Process through Quantitative and Qualitative Research



characteristics. The first article offers quantitative research, the second qualitative research. These two articles were chosen because they are good representatives of both tracks of research and illustrate within them good procedures of research. They will become a frame of reference for each step in the process of research for the quantitative and qualitative tracks. The two articles are the following:

- *Quantitative:* Deslandes, R., & Bertrand, R. (2005). Motivation of parent involvement in secondary-level schooling. *Journal of Educational Research*, 98(3), 164–175.
- *Qualitative:* Shelden, D. L., Angell, M. E., Stoner, J. B., & Roseland, B. D. (2010). School principals' influence on trust: Perspectives of mothers of children with disabilities. *Journal of Educational Research*, 103, 159–170.

Quantitative Research Characteristics

In **quantitative research**, the major characteristics are the following:

- Describing a research problem through a description of trends or a need for an explanation of the relationship among variables
- Providing a major role for the literature through suggesting the research questions to be asked and justifying the research problem and creating a need for the direction (purpose statement and research questions or hypotheses) of the study
- Creating purpose statements, research questions, and hypotheses that are specific, narrow, measurable, and observable
- Collecting numeric data from a large number of people using instruments with pre-set questions and responses
- Analyzing trends, comparing groups, or relating variables using statistical analysis and interpreting results by comparing them with prior predictions and past research
- Writing the research report using standard, fixed structures and evaluation criteria and taking an objective, unbiased approach

In *quantitative research*, the investigator *identifies a research problem* based on trends in the field or on the need to explain why something occurs. Describing a trend means that the research problem can be answered best by a study in which the researcher seeks to establish the overall tendency of responses from individuals and to note how this tendency varies among people. For example, you might seek to learn how voters describe their attitudes toward a bond issue. Results from this study can provide information on how a large population views an issue and the diversity of these views.

However, some quantitative research problems require that you explain how one variable affects another. *Variables* are an attribute (e.g., attitude toward the school bond issue) or characteristic of individuals (e.g., gender) that researchers study. By explaining a relation among variables, you are interested in determining whether one or more variables might influence another variable. For example, quantitative researchers may seek to know why certain voters voted against the school bond issue. The variables—gender and attitude toward the quality of the schools—may influence individuals' vote on the bond issue.

For example, examine the sample quantitative article—the parent involvement study—at the end of this chapter. The authors in the parent involvement study (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005) are less interested in describing the level of parent involvement in secondary-level schooling and more interested in examining the relationship between four factors—parents' role construction, self-efficacy, perceptions of teacher invitations, and perceptions of adolescent invitations—as predictors of parent involvement at home and at school. To examine this relation, they collect survey data from 770 parents of children in grades 7, 8, and 9 (American system equivalents to Canadian schools). Thus, the problem being addressed is that we know little about what factors relate to parental involvement in secondary-level schooling. Assessing whether certain factors predict an outcome is best suited to quantitative research.

In *reviewing the literature* in quantitative research, you will typically include a substantial literature review at the beginning of the study. Thus, the literature plays a major role in two ways: justifying the need for the research problem and suggesting potential purposes and research questions for the study. Justifying the research problem means that you use the literature to document the importance of the issue examined in the study. To accomplish this, you search the literature, locate studies that identify the problem as important to examine, and then cite this literature in the opening sections of a research report.

The literature also creates a need for the study, as expressed specifically in the purpose statement and the research questions or hypotheses. You identify in the literature

key variables, relations, and trends and use these to provide direction for your research questions and hypotheses. A literature review on college students, for example, may show that we know little about the problem of binge drinking. Existing literature, however, may identify the importance of peer groups and styles of interacting among student peer groups. Thus, important research questions might address how peers and their interaction styles influence binge drinking on college campuses. In this way, the literature in a quantitative study both documents the need to study the problem and provides direction for the research questions.

In the quantitative parent involvement study (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005), the authors cite extensive literature at the beginning of the article. In these paragraphs, the authors rely on the model of the parent involvement process, and they discuss the literature surrounding each of the four major factors that are expected to influence parental involvement. They begin by reviewing the literature about demographic or personal factors, such as family size and educational level, and then proceed to review the literature about the major factors in the study that they predict will influence parental involvement—parents' role construction, parents' self-efficacy, parents' perceptions of teacher invitations, and parents' perceptions of student invitations. In this way, the introduction establishes the research that has been reported in the literature on each of the four factors in the study and foreshadows the research questions that will be addressed in the study.

In *quantitative research questions*, you ask specific, narrow questions to obtain measurable and observable data on variables. The major statements and questions of direction in a study—the purpose statement, the research questions, and the hypotheses—are specific and narrow because you identify only a few variables to study. From a study of these variables, you obtain measures or assessments on an instrument or record scores on a scale from observations. For example, in a study of adolescent career choices, the variable—the role of the school counselor—narrows the study to a specific variable from among many variables that might be studied (e.g., role of parents or personal investment by student). To examine the impact of the school counselor on adolescent career choices, data must be obtained from the students.

In the quantitative parent involvement study (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005), the authors narrow and select a few factors that they predict will explain parental involvement. They state the purpose of their study and the major research questions. They say that they will examine four factors that influence parental involvement at home and at school and then identify the four factors that they predict will influence this involvement. Thus, their research questions are specific to four factors, and later in the method section, they explain how they will measure these factors.

In *quantitative data collection*, you use an instrument to measure the variables in the study. An *instrument* is a tool for measuring, observing, or documenting quantitative data. It contains specific questions and response possibilities that you establish or develop in advance of the study. Examples of instruments are survey questionnaires, standardized tests, and checklists that you might use to observe a student's or teacher's behaviors. You administer this instrument to participants and collect data in the form of numbers. For instance, you might collect responses based on students checking boxes on a form or from checklists that you complete as you watch a student perform a task in the classroom. The intent of this process is to apply the results (called *generalizing the results*) from a small number of people to a large number. The larger the number of individuals studied, the stronger the case for applying the results to a large number of people. For example, on a survey sent to 500 parents in a school district, the researcher seeks information about parents' attitudes toward the educational needs of pregnant teenagers in the schools. The researcher selects an instrument, "Attitudes Toward Education of Pregnant Teenagers," found through a search of library resources. The 500 parents who receive this instrument

represent a cross section of people from all socioeconomic levels in the school district. After collecting and analyzing these data, the investigator will draw conclusions about all parents in this school district based on the representative sample studied.

Data collection is also an integral part of the quantitative parent involvement study (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). The authors study a large number of parents (i.e., 770) of children in grades 7, 8, and 9. They survey parents using an adaptation of the instrument, the “Sharing the Dream! Parent Questionnaire,” as well as items on a questionnaire designed by other researchers to assess parents’ perceptions of student invitations. The survey items are translated into French to fit the Quebec context, and they gather quantifiable data (scores) on the survey. They discuss the scales used to collect the data and how they are scored (i.e., from 1 = *disagree very strongly* to 6 = *agree very strongly*).

In *quantitative data analysis*, you analyze the data using mathematical procedures, called *statistics*. These analyses consist of breaking down the data into parts to answer the research questions. The process always begins with describing your data by looking at measures, such as the mean (average), standard deviation, and the frequency of values. Statistical procedures such as comparing groups or relating scores for individuals provide information to address the research questions or hypotheses. You then interpret the results of this analysis in light of initial predictions or prior studies. This interpretation is an explanation as to why the results may have turned out the way they did, and often you will explain how the results either support or refute the expected predictions in the study.

For example, in the parent involvement study (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005), the authors collect responses from the parents of secondary-level students who provide scores on the survey instrument. The survey has questions relating to each of the eight factors (or constructs) and the outcome measures, as shown in Table 2 in the article. To examine the relation of factors to parental involvement, the researchers do not use all the items on the survey because some were not good measures of the factors. They use a statistical program to conduct factor analysis to help them identify the most important questions for each of the four scales composed of items (or factors) in the study. With this reduced set of questions for each of the four factors in the study, they then conduct descriptive analysis (i.e., means and standard deviations, as shown in Table 3) and use the statistical program of regression statistical analysis to predict whether the control or personal items or four predictors best explain the variation in scores for parent involvement. From Tables 4 and 5, we see what variables best explain the variation for each grade level (7, 8, and 9) and for the two outcome measures of parent involvement at home and parent involvement at school. In short, the authors use statistical analysis consisting of three phases: factor analysis, descriptive analysis, and regression analysis. The ultimate goal was to relate variables to see what predictors (demographics or the four factors) best explain parental involvement. Then, in the implication section of the article, the authors discuss the main results of the study and compare their results with those found in other studies in the literature.

In *reporting and evaluating* quantitative research, the overall format for a study follows a predictable pattern: introduction, review of the literature, methods, results, and discussion. This form creates a standardized structure for quantitative studies. In addition, it also leads to specific criteria that you might use to judge the quality of a quantitative research report. For example, you examine a quantitative study to see if it has an extensive literature review; tests good research questions and hypotheses; uses rigorous, impartial data collection procedures; applies appropriate statistical procedures; and forms interpretations that naturally follow from the data.

In quantitative research, you also use procedures to ensure that your own personal biases and values do not influence the results. You use instruments that are tested and that have reliable and valid scores from past uses. You design studies to control for all

variables that might introduce bias into a study. Finally, you report research without referring to yourself or your personal reaction.

In the quantitative parent involvement study (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005), the authors subdivide the research into standard sections typically found in quantitative studies. The study begins with an introduction that includes the literature review, purpose statement, and research questions; the methods; the results; the discussion; and, finally, the implications and limitations. The entire study conveys an impersonal, objective tone, and they do not bring either their biases or their personal opinions into the study. They use validated instruments to measure variables and employ multiple statistical procedures to build objectivity into the study.

Qualitative Research Characteristics

In **qualitative research**, we see different major characteristics at each stage of the research process:

- Exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon
- Having the literature review play a minor role but justify the problem
- Stating the purpose and research questions in an open-ended way to capture the participants' experiences
- Collecting data that is based on words (e.g., from interviews) or images (e.g., photographs) from a small number of individuals so that the participants' views are obtained
- Analyzing the data for description and themes using text analysis and interpreting the larger meaning of the findings
- Writing the report using flexible, emerging structures and evaluative criteria and including the researchers' subjective **reflexivity** and bias

Qualitative research is best suited to address a *research problem* in which you do not know the variables and need to explore. The literature might yield little information about the phenomenon of study, and you need to learn more from participants through exploration. For example, the literature may not adequately address the use of sign language in distance education courses. A qualitative research study is needed to explore this phenomenon from the perspective of distance education students. Unquestionably, using sign language in such courses is complex and may not have been examined in the prior literature. A *central phenomenon* is the key concept, idea, or process studied in qualitative research. Thus, the research problem of the difficulty in teaching children who are deaf requires both an exploration (because we need to better know how to teach these children) and an understanding (because of its complexity) of the process of teaching and learning.

The authors in the sample article on mothers' trust in school principals (Shelden, Angell, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010) build a case for the importance of trust in the opening passages of the article. They suggest that it is an important issue and that it has a positive effect on student outcomes. They then narrow the discussion to trust of school leaders and then to parents of children with disabilities and finally to the relationships between home and school partnerships for students with disabilities. They point out the problem of possible discrepant viewpoints between parents and schools—a potential problem that needs to be addressed. They then discuss the need for exploring further the critical role of principals in establishing trust in the relationships between families of children with disabilities and education professionals. In sum, they open the article by discussing the important central phenomenon of trust and exploring the potential discrepant viewpoints