

Methodological learning curve: predilection for qualitative over quantitative approaches in Zimbabwean social work dissertations

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Abstract

This study examines the nature of competency required of social work students in qualitative and quantitative methods as well as the preferred learning period duration for the acquisition of proficiency in each method. Utilising a descriptive-correlational design, data was gathered from a sample of 1268 social work students who completed their dissertations during their last year of study. The Kaplan-Meier survival analysis indicated that social work students need a longer duration to acquire proficiency in quantitative research strategies as opposed to qualitative and mixed methodologies. The hazard function prediction analysis indicated a significant likelihood of quantitative approaches not being utilized in students' dissertations, in contrast to other approaches. In terms of course structure, the majority (72%) of social work students learned both qualitative and quantitative approaches simultaneously. A simple linear regression analysis revealed that the research course structure had a statistically significant effect ($p < .05$) in predicting the improvement in the learning curve for particular methodological methods. We propose that the research method course structure be customized to meet the specific needs of students, such as providing methodological training and capacity development, implementing a research mentorship programme, fostering a supportive learning environment in all methodological approaches, and promoting inter-professional collaboration.

Keywords: Methodological choice, learning curve, research method, social work dissertations, Zimbabwe