

Critique of A Research Study

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Introduction

The article “A scoping review of mixed methods rigour in inclusive education: application of the Rigorous Mixed Method Framework” was authored by Elisabeth Kutscher and Bephyer Parey and was published in the International Journal of Inclusive Education in 2024. The research is a review of the methodology used in scholarly work on inclusive education. It examines the mixed methods methodology used in these studies to examine whether the current methods are working, and to understand the scope and limitations of current mixed methods research in the field. By reviewing the efficacy and rigor of the methodology being applied in current research on inclusive education, the usefulness, reliability, and value of the existing research can be better assessed, and any deficiencies in current practices can be addressed to improve the quality of research going further.

Research question

This review explores the following research questions: (a) What are the defining characteristics of mixed methods research in inclusive education? (b) How rigorously are mixed methods applied in inclusive education studies? (Kutscher and Parey 2024, pp. 2538). The review used the intentional combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches in one study and focused on operationally defined variables.

Problem/Inquiry

The research problem stated in the review is regarding mixed method studies, and is stated as such: when “developing a multidimensional understanding of inclusive education... researchers may be missing opportunities to apply mixed methods to their full potential”

(Kutscher and Parey 2024, pp. 2537). Drawing on Hong and Pluye's (2019) framework for critically appraising mixed-method studies, the study assesses methodological, conceptual, and reporting quality to evaluate the rigor of inclusive education research. The journal comments on the number of articles written on inclusive education and the reviews conducted on these articles. The authors found that previous reviews have largely focused on the methodologies used in these studies, rather than evaluating their overall findings and what they collectively reveal about inclusive education. This review attempts to fill a gap in knowledge left by current approaches and looks at the methodology the articles use. It argues that in order for the research to provide useful, reliable and fulsome data, the mixed methods research used in these studies should be rigorously designed, implemented and reported. For mixed methods research to provide a multidimensional understanding of inclusive education, such research should be rigorously designed, implemented and reported. As stated in the journal by Kutscher and Parey (2024): "Rigour, defined as the steps taken by researchers and the way in which these steps are reported", relates to Hong and Pluye's concepts of methodological and reporting quality. Accordingly, Harris, Reily, and Cresswell's Rigorous Mixed Methods Framework, which is focused on methodological and reporting quality, is a relevant tool to assess rigor in mixed method studies (Kutscher and Parey 2024). Considering the emphasis placed on global priority of inclusive education and the value of mixed methods in revealing the often-complex factors that influence inclusive policies and practices, it is essential to assess the scope and limitations of current mixed methods research in this field. Additionally, understanding the rigor of mixed methods research currently applied within inclusive education is important to pinpoint areas for growth and improvement.

Review of related literature

To collect the data, a comprehensive review of the literature on the topic of inclusive education was reviewed on an international scale. Though a comprehensive review was completed, the article itself did not engage with the papers used. The authors spent time discussing how they analyzed the papers and extracted the data more than they discussed the literature they used.

With regards to the reviews of Harrision, Reilly and Creswell's Rigorous Mixed Methods Framework this was not explored in depth. As a novice researcher I would have to review their original work to understand the methodology, and how and why it was used. Through the eyes of an empirical rationale the study consisted of previous reviews which were made up of studies that targeted teachers, but was not limited to students, pre-service teachers, administrators, caregivers and experts in the field. Building on the earlier discussion the review includes a summary of the literature and its implications for the problem/inquiry investigated. We can see the aim was to examine inclusive education research from both educators' perspectives and those involved with inclusion.

Methodology

The methodology used in this review was clearly laid out so that it could be easily replicated, as such for novice researchers. They began by telling the reader the criteria for inclusion, the databases searched, and the subject terms used, as well as any additional inclusion criteria. To select studies from the search results, they removed duplicates and ensured any studies selected met the inclusion criteria, those criteria being: the text investigated inclusive education in primary and secondary schools, were empirical and original studies and used mixed methods. They also discuss in detail throughout their methodology section how they reviewed the articles, how they collected/extracted the data from the articles, and how they constantly adjusted their criteria when new perspectives arose. The rationale provided for the methodology of the search

strategy and screening of studies is not stated outright, though the researchers say they followed the “preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines.” (Kutscher and Parey 2024, pp. 2538). This would be considered an appropriate methodology as mixed methods approach research explained in the review as it is a convergent design and in an exploratory sequential design. This is important because it uses both qualitative and quantitative data that are collected and analyzed simultaneously to then be integrated with a qualitative strand followed by a quantitative strand, such as when a researcher conducts focus groups to support the design of a questionnaire. By using this type of methodology, it allows the researcher to provide insights on trends in research that can be beneficial for novice researchers entering the field.

The review does not directly address confounding variables in the traditional sense, as it is not a primary research study that manipulates variables or controls such factors. Instead, it examines factors that may impact the rigor of mixed methods research, such as reporting quality, methodological approaches, and the integration of qualitative and quantitative findings. The sources provided for this journal, though the data search did not include restrictions on dates, had their earliest study in the year 2000. While providing a comprehensive review of literature on inclusive education, they did not limit the studies to specific populations, but many studies were on inclusive education with the focus on children and youth with disabilities, including a prevailing interest in this group. However, there was a smaller subset of studies applied for a broader view that addressed inclusive education for all students and those at risk of early school departure. A limitation worth noting within the review is the lack of engagement with the specific studies reviewed. While the authors discussed their analytical methods in detail, they provided less insight into the literature itself, which may leave novice researchers seeking a

deeper understanding of the original studies. An implication of this could be that there is a need to improve the rigor of mixed methods research that would be essential to develop a comprehensive understanding of inclusive education.

Findings/Results

The results and figures used in the review were very clearly laid out and easy to follow. With specific mention to the figures and tables used to represent their study selection and how each text studied was broken down into categories and ultimately laid out visually what was included in the review. The results indicated that North America and Europe used mixed methods more frequently than other countries when looking at research on inclusive education as shown in Table 1.

Discussion/Conclusion

The findings of this review suggest several key implications for international inclusive education research. Researchers worldwide need more training in rigorously applied mixed methods, with many low-cost resources to support this (Kutscher and Parey 2024). Journals in this field should emphasize rigor in mixed methods, as mentioned for questions to be addressed by this review. Despite a clear call to action for inclusive education practices, many young people still lack access to equitable, needs based education. The review states “Mixed method approaches, which capitalize on insights gained through the integration of qualitative and quantitative data, may offer an avenue for developing a more complete understanding of complex phenomena within the field.” (Kutscher and Parey 2024). This means that by combining qualitative and quantitative data, this may help researchers gain a fuller understanding of complex issues in the field. However, to be effective, these methods require rigorous application. When used thoughtfully, mixed methods can support researchers in addressing ongoing challenges in inclusive education.

References

Kutscher, E., & Parey, B. (2022). A scoping review of mixed methods rigour in inclusive education: application of the Rigorous Mixed Methods Framework. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 28(11), 2356–2371.

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