

Two main paradigms,
namely positivist and
interpretive



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Within research, there are two main paradigms, namely positivist and interpretive. The paradigm that a researcher uses depends on where they see themselves in relation to the world around them as well as their views and thoughts. Mukherji and Albon (2010: 10) detail this in regard to education when they state, “ Influencing the questions that we ask and underpinning the research approach we eventually take are our ideas and conceptions about childhood and children. This understanding of children and childhood ultimately influences the research paradigm that we use.”

Positivist researchers see themselves as outsiders looking ‘ in’ on research. This position is taken because the research believes they are ‘ separate’, not having relationships with the area they are researching. The main aim of research for a positivist is to form an explanation rather than an understanding. The research carried out is objective, with no personal bias affecting the research results. The data collected in positivist research is measurable i. e. numerical data formally known as quantitative data. Bassey (no date cited in Pollard 2002: 37) clearly defines the intention of positivist research when he states, “ To the positivist the purpose of research is to describe and understand the phenomena of the world and to share this understanding with others.”

Bassey’s explanation allows us to fully understand the idea that positivists believe themselves to be independent from their research, in which they do not have an opinion, and instead simply share what they have understood.

Interpretive researchers see themselves “ within the circle”, interpreting the world around them. They have an epistemological position of that of

someone co-creating and sharing knowledge, as well as creating relationships furthering their understand of different points of view. The research carried out is subjective, where results can be influenced by the opinions of the researcher. Data collected in interpretive research is 'rich' data, which is usually qualitative, although quantitative data can be collected as well. Bassey (no date cited in Pollard 2002: 38) defines once more the meaning of interpretive research when he mentions "To the interpretive researcher, the purpose of research is to describe and interpret the phenomena of the world in attempts to get shared meaning with others."

This explanation, highlights the difference between interpretive and positivist research clear. Interpretive researchers aim to interpret their results and detail the meaning to people, rather than just understanding what they have researched.

Personally, I believe myself to be within the Interpretive paradigm. My ontological position in education is that of someone sharing knowledge with others to understand the world around us. I believe it is important to have good relationships with people, to enable the knowledge they have and the knowledge I have can come together in order for effective learning to take place. For the purpose of this research, it was decided that interpretivist research methods were to be used, although some positivist methods would also be used to collect numerical, measurable data. By using interpretive research methods I was able to become part of the research and fully gauge and understand teachers opinions, on whether children with BESD should be taught in mainstream schools.

Within the interpretive paradigm there are a number of research methods that could be used when collecting data including:

Action Research

Observations

Questionnaires

Interviews

Action Research

Action research is practitioner based research, with the main focus being the transformation of practice. Practitioners look at their own practice and try to improve it, and develop their understanding of it. Action research is personal to the researcher, but they do require assistance for others including students and colleagues in order to implement the best possible changes to their practice. “ Action research allows teachers to study their own classrooms – for example, their own instructional methods, their own students, their own assessments – in order to better understand them and be able to improve their quality or effectiveness.” (Mertler, 2006 : 2)

Action research is very much an interpretive research method, as the researcher is part of the research. The researcher looks at their own core values within education, and then attempts to improve their practice in order to live out their values in the classroom environment. Action research can be seen as a cycle in which the researcher observes their practice, reflects on what they have seen, plans how to improve it, and then acts on the plans

made. (see appendix ?) The researcher can then start the whole process again if they feel they further changes could be made or they are unhappy with the results. In short, “ It is a powerful method of bridging the gap between the theory and practice of education; for here teachers are encouraged to develop their own personal theories of education from their own class practice.” (McNiff, 1988: 1)

For the purposes of this research, teacher opinions and views of inclusion relating to their own practice were the focus, rather than adapting personal practice. Due to this, action research was not used as a data collection method. However, if personal attitudes towards inclusion of children with BESD were to be explored, then action research would be a very effective research method.

Observations

In regard to education, observational research allows the researcher to gather data in person, watch participants and interpret what they see. It gives the researcher the chance to see rather than just be told how participant act and react in the classroom environment.

There are two main types of observations used in research which Kumar (2005: 120) details as:

Participant Observation

Non-Participant Observation

Participant observations involve the researcher actively becoming part of a group for the purposes of research. For example: sitting with a group of children, taking the role of a child learning in the classroom for that lesson. This would allow the researcher to observe firsthand how the children behaved in the lesson, without the fear of them acting differently because they knew they were being watched.

Non-participant observations involve the researcher not taking part, simply observing as an outsider, without the knowledge of those being observed. For example: sitting at the back of the classroom (with the teachers' knowledge) observing the how the children behave without their knowledge of being observed.

Although observations allow for actions to be seen rather than told, one of the disadvantages of this research method is "What counts as evidence becomes cloudy immediately in observation, because what we observe depends on when, where and for how long we look." (Cohen, Manion and Morrison: 2007: 396)

This alludes to the fact that observations, especially in the classroom can be rather short in relation to time, with data therefore only representing part, rather than the whole story.

For the purposes of this research, observations were not undertaken to gather data. The main reasons for this were the limited amount of data that could have been collected, the dependence on a number of factors including child behaviour/attendance, and the distance that would need to have been travelled carry out the observations. It was thought that to get teachers

<https://assignbuster.com/two-main-paradigms-namely-positivist-and-interpretive/>

opinions and views, observations would only give a snapshot of their classroom practice rather than what they actually thought personally.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires offer researchers the opportunity to gather large amounts of data, due to the number of questions that can be asked. They can contain open and closed questions as well as just open or just closed questions.

Questionnaires with closed questions collect quantitative data, which the researcher can measure during data analysis. This is because all participants have answered the same questions, selecting one of the options provided.

Questionnaires with open and closed questions collect qualitative and quantitative data, because although participants are answering the same questions to give quantitative results, by asking “ why?” after each question, the researcher has opened the questionnaire to explanations, hence having qualitative data to analyse as well.

There are many advantages to using questionnaires as a research method. They are economical to produce, both in cost and time, allowing a large number can be sent out thus increasing the possibility of getting a range of responses back. Participants also have anonymity, as their name does not appear on the questionnaire which means Kumar (2010: 148) refers to the benefit of this and states “ As there is no face-to-face interaction between respondents and interviewer, this method provides greater anonymity. In some situations where sensitive questions are asked it helps to increase the likelihood of obtaining accurate information.”

From this it is clear that if participants know they are going to remain anonymous, they are more likely to answer truthfully, which is essential in order for the research to be accurate.

There are also disadvantages of using questionnaires, especially the lack of responses and the lack of explanation of questions. It is inevitable that some participants will not return their questionnaires, maybe because they have lost it, or that it was too time consuming to complete and post. Some participants may also not understand the questions, and therefore leave them blank. Unlike interviews the researcher is not present to explain if the participant gets confused.

For this research, the disadvantages were thought about and solutions created. In relation to the lack of responses, digital questionnaires were designed and emailed to participants so that they could fill them out online, saving them time. Their anonymity still remained, as their names did not appear in the replies. QUOTE

In regard to the possibility of participants not understanding questions, a pilot test was carried out on the questionnaire to ensure the questions were not biased, made sense, were understandable and were relevant to the research question. (see pilot test pg)

For the purpose of this research, questionnaires were used as a data collection method. They were chosen because they allowed for a large amount of data to be collected, gathering a number of different opinions and views from teachers regarding the inclusion of children with BESD in

mainstream classrooms. The questionnaire contained a number of open and
<https://assignbuster.com/two-main-paradigms-namely-positivist-and-interpretive/>

closed questions, which enabled teachers to give further information relating to the questions. Six participants were chosen to participate in filling in the questionnaire as they were identified as having children with BESD in their classroom.

Interviews

Interviews are used in research to gather data directly from participants.

Interviews allow for a wide range of data to be collected as the interviewer has the ability to follow up answers and delve deeper to get further details. “

A skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings which questionnaires can never do.” (Bell, 2010: 161)

Interviews are a qualitative form of data collection as their results are rich in data and carry meaning. There are a number of advantages and disadvantages of carrying out interviews. One main advantage is the fact that the researcher is face to face with the participant, and so can get a feel for the opinions and views, rather than just interpreting them from answers on a questionnaire. One main disadvantage is the time it takes to carry out the interview, transcribe it and then analyse the data that it has provided. The researcher should make sure that the questions are relevant to the research question so that they are not transcribing lots of information which is redundant.

There are two main types of interviews namely:

Structured

Semi – structured

If a researcher chooses to undertake a structured interview, they will ask all participants the same questions and not deviate away from the questions set. A disadvantage of this type of interview is “ there is no opportunity for additional probing or follow-up questioning based on participants’ responses.” (McCrary, B., Ladd, B. Vermont, L. and Steele, J., 2010: 116)

If a researcher undertakes a semi-structured interview, they can probe the participants further on the answers they give, by including extended questions in the interview. This allows for researchers to fully understand participants’ views and opinions, which may not have been possible from just asking set questions. Walsh (2001: 65) refers to this when he details, “ In these situations, the researcher has fewer predetermined questions and is more likely to let the interview develop as a ‘ guided conversation’, according to the interests and wishes of the interviewee.”

For the purposes of this research, interviews were used as a method of collecting data. The research question required teachers’ opinions and views of inclusion of children with BESD, so by interviewing participants using semi structured interviews, it allowed me to question them further to gain a greater understanding of where they stood. It was deemed beneficial to use some of the questions from the questionnaire to ask in the interview. This was to allow for greater parity between the two research methods, and allow for clear results to be collected. The interview questions were pilot tested, to make sure that they made sense and were not biased or leading in any way (see pilot study page) Two teachers were interviewed, one newly qualified, and one with 19 years experience. These two teachers were selected

because they both had children with BESD in their class, and I thought it

<https://assignbuster.com/two-main-paradigms-namely-positivist-and-interpretive/>

would be interesting to see if their views differed with experience. Two teachers were chosen because this is a small scale piece of research, and interviewing more than two would be very time consuming and may have resulted in unnecessary data being collected.

Pilot Testing

Pilot testing provides a researcher with the opportunity to test their data collection methods. It gives them a chance to test the set questions to make sure they are: understandable, relevant and not biased or leading. “ After good questions have been developed using principles of question construction, a researcher pilot tests the questions. This helps determine that the individuals in the sample are capable of completing the survey and that they can understand the questions. (Cresswell, 2008: 402)

Pilot testing goes a long way to insuring that data collected is useful and significant to the research in question.

For the purposes of this research, pilot testing was carried out on both the questionnaire and interview. Two participants were chosen to complete the questionnaire and provide feedback focusing on the design and length of the questionnaire, as well as whether they thought the questions were leading, relevant and understandable. One participant was chosen to pilot the interview, and provide feedback on its relevance, length, possibilities of bias and layout. The data collected from pilot testing was not used in the research, but the feedback provided was taken into consideration, and relevant changes made to the questionnaire and interview to insure valuable data, relevant to the research question was collected.

Methodology For This Research

To fully determine professionals' opinions of whether children with BESD should be taught in mainstream schools, it was essential to carry out a small-scale research. Having explored the literature available it was then necessary to explore teachers own opinions and feelings, especially those teaching children with various behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Two interviews and six questionnaires were carried out, with these methods of collection deemed the most appropriate in order to understand this rather opinionated area of education.

Ethics Chapter

This chapter focuses on the ethical issues considered before, during and after this research was carried out.

When carrying out research, whether small or large scale, it is essential to remember the ethical implications that surround it. Johnson and Christensen (2010: 99) give a clear definition of ethics when they state, " Ethics are the principles' and guidelines that help uphold the things we value."

For research to be accurate and successful, participant's ideas, opinions and thoughts need to be collected, interpreted and analysed. This cannot be carried out ' off the cuff'; instead certain steps must be taken to insure ethical implications have been considered and implemented within the research. This research was carried out in conjunction with SMUC ethical guidelines. Throughout each stage of research, ethical issues were well thought out and are detailed under the following headings:

Permission from Participants

Access and Refusal

Anonymity

The headings were seen as essential points that needed to be in place in order for the research to be ethically sound. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010: 18) reinforce the importance of ensuring all ethical implications are considered when carrying out research, including getting permission, maintaining anonymity and allowing for refusal, “ For the most part, issues of ethics focus on establishing safeguards that will protect the rights of participants. The traditional and often dominant issues that emerge when considering research ethics involve obtaining informed consent from participants, protecting them from harm, and ensuring confidentiality.”

Permission

Before any educational research takes place, it is paramount for the researcher to gain permission from all participants taking part in the research. By giving their permission, participants are indicating that they have understood the research being carried out and give their permission for their data to be used. The British Educational Research Association (2004: 6) details “ The Association takes voluntary informed consent to be the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway.”

For the purpose of this research, permission was requested from the relevant participants before any research took place, and they were made aware of

the research question and why they had been selected. A letter was sent to the relevant schools detailing the research question, seeking permission for members of staff to fill out questionnaires and be open to the possibility of being interviewed. (Appendix ?) If schools wanted to give their permission, they returned the consent form located at the bottom of the original letter in the self-addressed envelope provided. The participants who were chosen to fill out questionnaires were sent electronic questionnaires, which at the top gave a brief explanation of the research. They were then asked to click on the check box to state they were giving their consent for their data to be used as part of the research. The participants who were interviewed signed a declaration form (appendix ?) stating they understood the research being carried out as well as giving their consent. Participants may give implied (verbal) or explicit consent (written) to participate in research. However, for the purposes of this research however, written permission was preferred as hard evidence in the event of any ethical issues arose during the research process.

Access and Refusal

It is essential when carrying out research that the researcher remains professional at all times. Participants must be treated with respect and kept updated throughout the research process. Allowing participants to access finished research is beneficial as it gives them the opportunity to see how their data has been used. It is also important that participants are given the option of data refusal. This means that their data is not used at all in the research and is removed on immediate request. A relationship of trust and respect should be in place between the researcher and the participant, and

although the participant has given permission for their data to be used, refusal and access must be allowed throughout the whole process. It is (2006: 8) suggests that “ it should be made clear to personal that by enrolling in a study they are not committed to remaining in the study and they may terminate their participation at any time.”

Throughout this research, participants were given the right of refusal as well as an opportunity to view research once completed. Allowing participants to view the finished research will be extremely beneficial, as it will allow them to give feedback and help develop any future research undertaken.

Anonymity

Researchers must do all they can to protect the anonymity of participants and keep any personal data private. Participants give information in good faith, and it would be unethical for a researcher to mention participants within research or leave data in places where others could access it.

Foreman-Peck and Winch (2010: 119) detail the importance of anonymity when they state “ Such promised are given to protect the identity of the participants. This is necessary to protect them from any harmful consequences of sensitive or negative findings, or indeed the stigmatisation of institutions or communities.”

Throughout this research, the anonymity of all participants has been upheld, with no personal information, including their name or school mentioned. Instead, participants have been given a designated number, e. g. teacher 1, which is referred to throughout the research. The data collected has been

kept in a confidential box, and not left anywhere that would enable others to read it.

Meth References

Bell, J. (2010). *Doing Your Research Project*. 5th ed. Berkshire: Open University Press

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education*. 6th ed. Oxon: Routledge.

Creswell, J. (2008). *Educational Research – Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.

Kumar, R. (2005). *Research Methodology – A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

McCrary, B., Ladd, B., Vermont, L. and Steele, J.. (2010). Interviews. In: Miller, P., Strang, J. and Miller, P. *Addiction Research Methods*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.

McNiff, J. (1988). *Action Research – Principles and Practice*. New York: Routledge.

Mertler, C. (2006). *Action Research – Teachers as Researchers in the Classroom*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Mukherji, P. and Albon, D. (2010). *Research Methods in Early Childhood: An introductory guide*. London: Sage Publications LTD

Pollard, A. (2002). *Readings for Reflective Teaching*. London: Continuum

Walsh, M. (2001) *Research Made Real – A Guide for Students*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes

References ethics

Johnson, B. and Christensen, L. (2010). *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches*. 4th ed. London: Sage Publications LTD.

Lodico, M., Spaulding, D. and Voegtle, K. (2010). *Methods in Educational Research: From Theory to Practice*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

British Educational Research Association (2004). *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. Notts: British Educational Research Association.

Ilitis, A. S. (2006). *Human Subjects Research: Ethics and Compliance*. In: Ilitis, A. S *Research Ethics*. Oxon: Routledge.

Foreman-Peck, L. and Winch, C. (2010). *Using Educational Research to Inform Practice: A Practical Guide to Practitioner Research in Universities and Colleges*. Oxon: Routledge.