

Combine qualitative and quantitative data

Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data can improve an evaluation by ensuring that the limitations of one type of data are balanced by the strengths of another.

This will ensure that understanding is improved by integrating different ways of knowing. Most evaluations will collect both quantitative data (numbers) and qualitative data (text, images), however it is important to plan in advance how these will be combined.

Methods

When data are gathered

- Parallel data gathering

Qualitative and quantitative data are gathered at the same time.

For example, a closed-ended questionnaire to many service users is done at the same time as semi-structured observations of the service center.

- Sequential data gathering

Sequencing is one way of combining qualitative and quantitative data by alternating between them.

When data are combined

- Component design

Component design is an approach to mixed methods evaluation that conducts qualitative components of the evaluation separately to quantitative components and then combines the data at the time of report writing.

- Integrated design

Integrated Design is an approach to mixed options evaluation where qualitative and quantitative data are integrated into an overall design.

Purpose of combining data

- Enriching

‘Enriching’ is achieved by using qualitative work to identify issues or obtain information on variables not obtained by quantitative surveys.

- Examining

‘Examining’ refers to generating hypotheses from qualitative work to be tested through the quantitative approach.

- Explaining

‘Explaining’ involves using qualitative work to understand unanticipated results from quantitative data.

In principle, this mechanism may operate in either direction – from qualitative to quantitative approaches or vice versa.

- Triangulation

Triangulation facilitates validation of data through cross verification from more than two sources.

Resources

Guides

- Introduction to mixed methods in impact evaluation

This guide, written by Michael Bamberger for InterAction outlines the elements of a mixed methods approach with particular reference to how it can be used in an impact evaluation.

- Conducting mixed-method evaluations

This technical note from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) provides an overview of using a mixed-methods approach for evaluation.