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## Implementing Research Methods with Confidence: A Review of Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners

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## Implementing Research Methods with Confidence: A Review of Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners

### Abstract

The authors of this work reviewed Ranjit Kumar's book entitled *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). This book can provide desirable skills for readers regarding writing a successful research project and implementing research methods with confidence. It goes beyond teaching students how to conduct academic qualitative and quantitative research. It can also be adapted to various projects that scholars will encounter throughout their careers.

### Keywords

qualitative, research methodology

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### Acknowledgements

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## **Implementing Research Methods with Confidence: A Review of *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners***

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The authors of this work reviewed Ranjit Kumar's book entitled *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). This book can provide desirable skills for readers regarding writing a successful research project and implementing research methods with confidence. It goes beyond teaching students how to conduct academic qualitative and quantitative research. It can also be adapted to various projects that scholars will encounter throughout their careers.

*Keywords:* qualitative, research methodology

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### **Introduction**

Kumar (2011) has prepared a book entitled, *Research Methodology: A Step by a Step Guide for Beginners*, in which he presents how to implement research-related activities. The key themes of his book “described both quantitative and qualitative research approach and mixed-method approach” were designed specifically for students who are newcomers to research and who may have psychological barriers regarding conducting and presenting their own research works. He has written this book based on the model developed during his teaching career and has crafted it as a highly relevant resource for students at different levels as a practical guide. Kumar prepared the first edition in 1999, the second edition in 2005, and the third edition in 2011. The third edition of the book incorporated some of the suggestions made by the reviewers, colleagues, and students in the first and second editions. The major improvements made by Kumar in his 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the book were differentiation between qualitative and quantitative research as well as providing more in-depth field examples based upon actual experiences included in this edition.

Kumar used a variety of context-specific examples to demonstrate why understanding the research process is important for a variety of professions. The book provides an opportunity for further application to practice, for educators who would use this text. Kumar also clearly associates research, theory, and their application to practice. Moreover, this book can be an ideal resource for a student, researcher, or business professional who needs to understand qualitative and quantitative research methodology.

The book is divided into eight sections (from chapter 3 to chapter 18), each of which covers a specific, sequential aspect of the research process and includes detailed instructions on how to adopt it. The chapter titles are clear and descriptive, with an extensive list of subsections that provide good awareness to readers in a wide range of topics. The quantitative research process is reasonably well structured, whereas the qualitative research approaches are fairly unstructured, and these are their respective strengths as well as weakness as described in this book. Therefore, this book is helpful for theoretical information in an operational manner about methods, procedures, and techniques that are used in both approaches for academic disciplines in any field of study.

In our book review, we first presented a theoretical analysis, then we discussed our opinion on the strengths and weaknesses of the book, and finally, we concluded and forwarded recommendations.

### **Theoretical Analysis**

Kumar described eight main steps in his book: formulating a research problem, conceptualizing a research design, constructing an instrument for data collection, selecting a sample, writing a research proposal, collecting data, processing and displaying data, and writing a research report. Kumar excluded research as a way of thinking, and the research process can be surmised by a glance at the basic steps mentioned in his book. Under each step, Kumar listed the main topic and subtopics as a chapter using different theoretical analyses.

The first chapter, "Research: A way of thinking," explains what research is and why it is necessary in various fields. This relates to the second chapter, "The research process: A quick glance," which summarizes the steps involved in both quantitative and qualitative research. The remaining sections are organized according to the eight major steps taken in quantitative and qualitative research. Kumar explained his lists of chapter objectives and mentioned keywords for each chapters. For instance, step I consisted of chapter three, chapter four, chapter five, and chapter six. Those four distinctive chapters include reviewing the literature, formulating a research problem, identifying variables, and constructing hypotheses, respectively. Kumar filled chapters under each step with details of objectives, keywords, a summary, and issues, should the readers think about the chapter in the future.

Following the above two introductory chapters, the third chapter has written under step I, elaborating on reviewing the literature review with learning outcomes and keywords for the readers for both research approaches. In this chapter, Kumar articulated for readers how to review literature using existing literature in one's field of study, developing a theoretical framework and conceptual framework. At the end of this chapter, a brief summary and important keynotes were presented to students to memorize the essential part of the chapter. Kumar discussed formulating a research problem in chapter four with included chapter objectives and keywords to think about throughout the entire chapter. In addition, he has written relevant points to consider when selecting a research problem and the steps that students should take to formulate a research problem. He supported how to formulate research objectives with practical examples for topics and supported using different visual aids, that is, tables and figures. Finally, Kumar concluded this chapter by summarizing key points in the chapter and keynotes: "People, problems, programs, and phenomena or the four Ps (p. 59)". On the other hand, he has written about how to identify variables in chapter five under the category of step one. In this chapter, Kumar described definitions of variables and types of variables relevant for students specifically for beginners pertinent to research activities. He also added types of measurements "nominal or classificatory scale, ordinal or ranking scale, interval scale, and ratio scale." In this step, similar to other chapters, objectives of the chapter, keywords, and key terminologies were included with their respective definitions. Kumar tried to explain the difference between a concept and a variable with a practical supporting example for each. He articulated some mechanisms to convert concepts into variables. At the end of this chapter, he made a summary of the topics addressed and issues for students to consider while dealing with a chapter. Kumar also raised concepts and theories pertinent to constructing hypotheses as a final chapter of step I (chapter six). He organized this chapter with a number of objectives for learners and keywords relevant to constructing a hypothesis. He also postulated characteristics of the hypothesis and some errors likely to occur for beginners when testing the hypothesis. He noted the greater

emphasis on hypothesis in the quantitative research approach as opposed to the qualitative research approach. He explained that the difference in hypothesis for qualitative research was due to qualitative research hypothesis formulation being far less “practicable and advisable.” At the end of this chapter, Kumar forwarded a few summaries and things that the learner should think about it.

In step II, Kumar proposed conceptualizing a research design with two chapters (seven and eight). Those chapters deal with the research design and selecting a study design. Chapter seven emphasized research design as well as the outcome of the chapter and important keywords in the chapter. Kumar supported the relevance of research design with the work of Kerlinger (1986, in Kumar, 2011), stating as a research design is a plan, structure, and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions or problems. He also cited the definition of a research design: a procedural plan that is adopted by a researcher to answer questions validly, objectively, accurately, and economically (Thyer 1993, in Kumar, 2011). Kumar elaborated this chapter with a theory of causality and research design (p. 96), which he supported with an example of “Factors affecting the relationship between a counseling service and the extent of marital problems using Figure 7.1 (p. 96)”. In addition, he explained the importance of research design by identifying the basic functions of research design and how to build in the design. Finally, he summed up key points and reminder notes for students. Chapter seven established foundations for chapter 8, which deals with selecting a study design in step II. Kumar wrote wisely and carefully organized similar concepts together under the same step. He addressed the central questions of the book about the difference between quantitative and qualitative study design as well as common study design in qualitative research and when to use it. He also explained that the difference between both approaches was because of “Philosophical perspectives in each paradigm” (p. 104). He mentioned details of study design in qualitative research design using case studies, oral history, focus groups, observation, holistic research, and community discussion forums for learners if they wish to follow this type of research study design. He assumed action research, feminist research, and participatory and collaborative research inquiry as part of qualitative research design. In the end, Kumar often included summaries and encouraged readers to think about issues at the end of each chapter for learners to memorize key terms and concepts in the chapter.

Step III deals with constructing an instrument for data collection. Kumar organized this step into three chapters (nine, ten, and eleven). Kumar explained to the learners the different methods of data collection in quantitative and qualitative research solely under chapter nine. He noted that the main differences between the two approaches were “mainly due to the restrictions imposed on flexibility, structure, sequential order, depth and freedom that a researcher has in their use during the research” (p. 108). Kumar mentioned some approaches pertinent to information gathering using primary data and secondary data in his book under chapter nine. Qualitative research data collection mechanisms and quantitative data collection instruments are mentioned with their respective merits and demerits. In addition to this, Kumar concluded this chapter with problems with using data from secondary sources, a summary of key points, and a reminder of some key issues for learners “to think about” (p. 133). Kumar deals with collecting data using attitudinal scales in chapter ten and ways of measuring attitudes in quantitative versus qualitative research approach. He has written details regarding general methods of data gathering instruments in chapter nine, whereas in a chapter he emphasized only attitudinal scales ways of data collection. In chapter ten, Kumar specified three types of attitudinal scales: “summated rating scale, Thurstone scale, and Guttman scale” (p. 159). In this chapter, Kumar specified step by step how to construct a summated, Likert, or the remaining two scales. He concluded the chapter with attitudes and qualitative research. He also pointed out that the Guttman scale is one of the

“most difficult scales” to construct and therefore rarely used (p. 175). Finally, he pointed readers to the learner’s summary of the chapter and encouraged them to think about remarks. Establishing the validity and reliability of research, the instrument was addressed in chapter eleven. Kumar initiated this chapter by addressing that for learners, in addition to data collection instruments, issues of validity and reliability of data collection instruments were important topics of research in his book. Kumar's method of book writing is useful for students because each chapter starts with objectives and keywords to be addressed throughout the chapter. Kumar pointed the readers to the works of Babbie (1973, in Kumar, 2011) and Smith (1991, in Kumar, 2011) regarding concepts and definitions of validity. In addition, he categorized types of validity in quantitative research and how to construct validity. Kumar also referred readers to the work of Moser and Kalton (1989, in Kumar, 2011) about reliability. They defined the concept of reliability as the idea that repeated measurements made by the instrument under constant conditions will give the same result. Kumar also raised the debate of validity and reliability usage in qualitative research. Some authors explained that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were the four indicators of validity and reliability in qualitative research as it is cited in this book (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, in Kumar, 2011). Therefore, Kumar concluded this chapter with a summary and reminder points to readers.

In step IV, Kumar organized issues related to selecting a sample. He solely allocated chapter twelve to this topic. Kumar presented this step in chapter twelve with some specific objectives about how to select a sample and keywords at the beginning of the chapter. Kumar explained the differences between sampling in quantitative and qualitative research by two opposing philosophies. He separately addressed different sampling types for quantitative research; for instance, all probability sampling techniques. He also added that sampling in qualitative research was all non-probability sampling designs. Lastly, he included an important issue about the concept of a “data saturation point” in qualitative research, where no new information is forthcoming, or it is negligible (pp. 193-194). At the end of this chapter, Kumar made a summary of key points in the chapter for the learners.

In step V, Kumar described writing a research proposal as an essential part of research work in his book. He mentioned briefly the purpose of a research proposal in quantitative and qualitative research, as well as how to structure and write a research proposal in his book under this step in chapter 13. Kumar listed for learners each content piece of the proposal for both approaches with a practical example for each component of the proposal. At the end of this chapter, he included the learner’s summary on proposal writing and reminded readers of keynotes.

In step VI, Kumar covered collecting data. He organized data collecting under chapter 14 as considering ethical issues in data collection. He designed this chapter for learners for some of the challenges they may encounter in the future as a beginner. All professions are guided by a code of ethics that has evolved over the years to accommodate. Kumar supported his work in this chapter through scholars' work. He borrowed the definition of ethics from Collins Dictionary (1979, in Kumar, 2011), “ethical means following principles of conduct that are considered correct, especially those of a given profession or group.” Kumar advised research beginners to prohibit themselves from certain behaviors in research such as causing harm to individuals, breaching confidentiality, using information improperly, and introducing biases that are considered unethical in any profession. Kumar raised important issues about stakeholders in research, research participants, researchers, and funding organizations while collecting data or information from those stakes. He included the work of Schinke and Gilchrist (1993, in Kumar, 2011) about seeking consent in research. They described that under “standards set by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects, all informed consent procedures must meet three criteria participants’ competency, sufficient

information, and voluntary” (p. 244). Kumar noted that in his opinion, giving a small gift after having obtained your information as a token of appreciation is ethical, but giving incentives before data collection is unethical. Thus, Kumar concluded this chapter, similarly to other chapters in the book, with a summary and reminding notes.

In step VII, Kumar wrote processing data and displaying data in chapters 15 and 16, respectively. He organized this chapter based on prior chapters of data collection and instrument preparation for both qualitative and quantitative research. In chapter 15, Kumar discussed processing data and explained the objectives of the chapter and keywords for learners. The chapter is organized into two parts: data processing in quantitative research, and data processing in qualitative studies. For instance, editing and coding are some examples of quantitative research whereas content analysis is an example of qualitative research. Kumar used several steps and some data processing activities in this chapter. Finally, he summed up this chapter with a summary and reminder keynotes for the learners. In addition, Kumar also presented issues of displaying data under chapter 16, specifically regarding the four ways of communicating and displaying the analyzed data such as texts, tables, graphs, and statistical measures. Kumar often expressed displaying data presentation for quantitative research, especially for bivariate types of data; however, in this chapter, this was not explained or included. Finally, Kumar concluded this chapter with a summary and reminding points.

In step VIII, Kumar stated his final remarks on concepts of writing a research report under chapter 17 in this book. He described research writing objectives, how to write a research report, the outline of a research report, different reference-writing styles, and keywords assumed to be important for the learners. Kumar stated, “The main difference between research and other writing is in the degree of control, rigorousness and caution required (p. 314)” Additionally, he explained qualitative research writing in chapter 15 more broadly. Kumar explained about developing a research writing outline with some research topics or research titles for the learners. He also noted that referencing style would be determined based on the interest of universities or research institutes. To this step VIII, Kumar devoted only one chapter (17), but he also included research methodology and evaluation in chapter 18. However, this chapter incorporated important insights pertinent to research methodology and evaluation. Kumar listed types of evaluation, ethics during research evaluation, and different philosophical principles of evaluation in research. Kumar concluded both chapters with summaries and reminding points as he already stated in other chapters.

At the end of this book, Kumar concluded by using some exercises for a beginner as an appendix and glossary with important terminologies in his book for beginners in this edition.

### **Weaknesses of the Book**

- ✓ The content of the book and what is written inside the textbook have different names. For instance, in the book, he only named chapters using numbers, whereas in the entire text he used chapters under each step.
- ✓ In step VIII, Kumar mentioned only one chapter (chapter 17). However, he also addressed chapter 18 about research methodology and evaluation. In my opinion, missing the important chapter under the step he included might be due to a lack of proofreading and organization of chapters under each step. It would be better to revisit this formatting before final publication by the author and publisher.

- ✓ Kumar excluded chapter one and chapter two, categorizing them under steps as he did for other chapters in his book. He mentioned nothing about why he excluded those chapters from organizing under any steps.
- ✓ In the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of his book, Kumar edited based on his student feedback. However, while getting feedback from learners is important, using students in general as sole editors affected the quality of the book. Well known researcher and professor critics regarding this work could weigh if he invited them as his editors rather than using criticism and feedback only from his students.
- ✓ Kumar excluded exercise or practical activities to exercise for students. He pointed out that this book was more focused on beginners in research activities. No single exercise is indicated in any chapters of his book.
- ✓ The summary given in each chapter in all steps in his book seems shallow and I don't think that this may help in understanding key topics of the chapter for his students or readers.
- ✓ We noticed Kumar has included a few citations in his work. However, supporting important points from different research books may improve this book's quality.
- ✓ He noted that this book focused on qualitative and quantitative research approaches. However, he paid more attention to the theoretical aspects of the quantitative research approach and was less focused on qualitative data analysis methods since this was designed for beginners or those new to research activities.
- ✓ There are no activities at the beginning of the chapter that might help the learners evaluate prior knowledge and ideas about the issues discussed in each chapter and motivate the learners to predict what might be gained from reading the topics discussed.
- ✓ This book used several tables and different diagrams, but they are not easily eligible to read and understand.

### **Strengths of the Book**

- ✓ The book has been published by a world-class renowned publisher since 1965: SAGE. This has a psychological impact on readers' or learners' perceptions of quality.
- ✓ The cover page design and the book title exactly matched: the diagram on the cover page shows some steps and levels, which complement the title of the book: Step guide for beginners.
- ✓ Kumar mentioned chapter objectives under each throughout this book. Since this book is designed for beginners, knowing each chapter's objectives is important in order to think easily about the message of the chapter within a given framework.
- ✓ He described a sort of summary and urged readers to think about it under each chapter of each step.
- ✓ The topics move from simple to complex concepts and that encourages readers who have no prior knowledge.
- ✓ The reflective questions throughout the book can help students consolidate their knowledge.
- ✓ The chapters contain figures and tables for enhanced visual learning and analysis.



- ✓ It focuses on developing research skills by providing practical examples from both qualitative and quantitative research for a balanced and comprehensive grounding in research methodology.
- ✓ Comparing and contrasting concepts in quantitative and qualitative research helps readers understand the differences and similarities between the two types of research, which is especially useful for novice researchers like the readers of this book.
- ✓ Kumar provides an excellent introduction to research methodology as well as a solid foundation for teaching techniques, from formulating a research problem to designing, sampling, writing a research proposal, collecting and processing data, and writing up a report.
- ✓ His organization of the book in terms of steps and chapters shows how he organized it carefully for his students. He organized similar chapters or similar concepts under one step.
- ✓ Language coherence and overall flow of the idea from paragraph to paragraph are easily understood by the learners at any level while reading this book.

### **Conclusions and Argumentation**

In this book review, we conclude that any book writer is advised to consider important argumentation and steps necessary to include in his/her new editions. The writer tried to include an important difference between his third edition and the remaining two editions of his book. However, the new edition of the book in most cases incorporates updated issues on the agenda about the topics of the book in accordance with the changing circumstances. The book tried to organize similar concepts together under one step and was tagged as a chapter. Even though classifying the book as steps seems interesting, assigning 18 chapters in this research book for beginners created a little bit of confusion for readers and learners. The writer tried to include some statistical analysis but the statistical analysis we know in different research books were preferred in practicability. The effort he made to support other researchers' work shows a good move but nonetheless, it needs more references and citations from both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The way he included keywords, a glossary, and an appendix in this book will be a good example for other book writers. We understand his intention to familiarize newcomers with research works, and efforts towards beginners in research job categories are a good lesson for us.

Overall, this book provides novice researchers with well-thought-out and detailed guidance on the nature and procedures of conducting quantitative and qualitative research. It can be used as an ideal entry-level textbook on research methodology in various disciplines because of its structure and content, which includes thoughtfully designed learning objectives, reflective tasks, and exercises. More information about some classic research methodology resources in both quantitative and qualitative research would be beneficial to readers.

### **Recommendations**

After in-depth reading, we found the following issues need to be improved or amendments required:

- The content of the book and what is written inside the textbook should be improved as advised if it is similar in naming/title.

- Each step should be revised and reorganized. For example, issues like in step VIII in this book should be solved. I thought that missing the vital chapter under the step he included might be because of proofreading and organization errors, but these should be revisited before final publication by the author and publisher. Even publishers should consider this such issues during book production and publications.
- A title or justifications for why a title was excluded should be given for chapters one and two; why were these chapters not categorized under steps like those that he did for other chapters in his book? He mentioned nothing about why he excluded those chapters from organization under any steps.
- Ideas and criticisms of distinguished professors along with the comments of the learners should be incorporated. Getting feedback from the learners is important, but assuming students in general as sole editors affected the quality of this book.
- Practical exercises or activities should be provided to students to encourage able work, since this book is more focused on beginners in research activities.
- Details of the summary and keynotes in given chapters should be incorporated in all steps in his book important.
- It would be advisable to cite similar works and compare them with other research books. This would result in important points from different research books that may improve the quality of the book.
- Qualitative and quantitative research approaches should be paid equivalent attention; important statistical analysis should be provided for the quantitative part and common data analysis software for the qualitative part. This would make this book more acceptable.
- There should be some introduction in each chapter that may help the learners to evaluate prior knowledge and ideas about the issues discussed in each chapter and that motivates the learners to predict what must be gained from reading the topics discussed.

The book author should use vivid tables and readable diagrams.

### **References**

Kumar, R. (2011). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

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