Important Remarks about Mixed Design Research in Sociology

Müzeyyen Aytül Kasapoğlu*

Professor of Sociology, Baskent University Department of sociology, Turkey

*Corresponding author: Müzeyyen Aytül Kasapoğlu, Professor of Sociology, Baskent University Department of sociology, Turkey

Abstract

It is a fact that mixed design research in sociology is less carried out in terms of quantity than in other fields such as education, health and business. There are various reasons for this. The different strong assumptions of classical sociological theories about society and the individual, as well as the loyalty of sociologists to the identities they have based on them, do not encourage mixed design studies. On the other hand, the process-based approach of Relational Sociology, which minimizes the differences between classical macro and micro research, which has become widespread in recent years, rejecting dualities and essentialism, aiming to develop new concepts by not seeing existing concepts as sufficient, and emphasizing reflexivity provided the theoretical basis suitable for mixed-design studies. In addition, the problem-oriented studies of relational sociology on the basis of Pragmatism with mixed design studies increased the cooperation and encouraged sociologists to conduct mixed design research. Thus, sociology, as one of the most important social sciences, has increased its contribution to science and the opportunity to make more valid and wider suggestions for the solution of social problems has increased.

Keywords: Sociology; Relational sociology; Mixed design; Pragmatism

Introduction

Even though it has been another 20 years since the mixed-design researches, which started in the 1980s, if not very old, and were said to have emerged from infancy and entered adolescence in by Abbas Tashakkori [1], it cannot be said that remarkable steps have been taken in Turkey, especially in the field of sociology, except for some individual initiatives [2]. Because the painless transition from mono-method studies to mixed-method studies and the use of at least three different research techniques (document analysis, statistics, survey, interview, observation, etc.) it is not easy. On the other hand, «pragmatism» constitutes the epistemological basis of mixed pattern studies. This means that the parties agree on pragmatism as a single source of knowledge, rather than separate paradigms. In other words, it seems appropriate to separate the discussion of method or research technique from epistemology by focusing on philosophical assumptions. In short, it is assumed that pragmatism, that is, the usefulness of research in solving problems, will overcome many difficulties. The main aim is thus to integrate the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research on a philosophical basis. The aim is to achieve consensus in utilitarianism instead of the war of paradigms. In short, it can be said that paradigms have lost and therefore pragmatism has regained.

According to the history of social sciences, qualitative research was dominant all over the world until the 1960s, thanks to previous social scientists, especially anthropologists. After the Second World War, that is, between 1960 and 1980, quantitative research dominates. Since the 1980s, scientists have left aside the paradigmatic changes and started to conduct mixed research on the basis of pragmatism.

Theoretical Support of Mixed Pattern Studies in Sociology

One of the most important features of relational sociology, which attracts more and more attention today, is to be against dualities. The sociological approach, starting from being against this mind-body or subject-object distinction, to the quantitative-qualitative association, differs from classical sociology with its features such as the rejection of essentialism and the importance of ambiguity and differences. Sociologists who examine everyday life on a process-based basis also need to be self-reflective. The structure-individual dichotomy, like theory-practice or time-space distinctions, is nothing but a dead end. Principles such as identity, non-contradiction and the impossibility of the third option, which are in accordance with Aristotle's Formal Logic, are no longer sufficient to understand today's complex and rapidly changing societies at either a macro or micro level. The idea of doing mixed design work, which has become increasingly popular in Turkey with research in the field of health and education, is quite old in sociology. The most important works on this subject were first published by Mills CW [3] did. It is possible to find it in his works called "Sociological Imagination" and "Character and Social Structure" he wrote with H. Gerth, who carried the influence of M. Weber from Germany to the USA. They examine structure and individual together at macro and micro levels, opposing all dualities and methodological constraints. They look at which types of people with dominant characters emerge in which social structures. They use quantitative and qualitative research data together, blending positivist and interpretive sociological traditions. It is possible to find the theoretical basis of mixed design studies in sociology in Bourdieu [4] and his «reflexive sociology». Social scientists need to be aware that their understanding and explanation of the society they study is different from those who study other objects. In fact, being reflexive means that social scientists are conscious in the first place that they are a part of the society they are studying. This means that social scientists participate in research with their own background (biography) and behavior, along with the subjects and objects they study. Because social scientists participate in social life by being influenced by it. Here, there is not one-way but mutual interaction.

In fact, leaving aside unnecessary judgments such as the «war of paradigms» [5], it can be said that the idea of combining quantitative and qualitative research arose from the need to overcome the duality of structure and individual, which is one of the classical problems of sociology. On the other hand, by working on a process-based basis, rejecting essentialism and dualism, Bourdieu offers us a reflexive sociology. Thus, we sociologists try to get rid of our scholastic biases to the extent that we are aware of the fact that we are a part of the social structure that we examine through our individual life stories and behaviors. As Bourdieu [6] emphasizes, we social scientists constantly create categories for analysis in order to understand social facts and behaviors. In fact, we are reconstructing already constructed social structures by doing double hermeneutic. What is important here is to save

social scientific representations from slipping from the «model of reality» to the «reality of the model». Because most of the time, we are obsessively attached to the model we have created in our minds. Unfortunately, even though the model we built is far from reality, we can ignore it. For this reason, it seems appropriate that we take the methodological warnings and even advices of reflexive sociology [7] and its orientation to mixed design in this framework seriously.

Thus, the claim that mixed design studies are reflexive, as well as the theoretical framework of «constructivist structuralism», is largely grounded. Because what Bourdie [8] actually wants to tell us in his studies is that quantitative and qualitative techniques are indispensable phases (moments) of the research process. Thus, by involving both the structure and the individual in the process, we also challenge artificial dualities. In summary, we can say that constructivist structuralism offers a middle way solution proposal, as if to defeat the structure-individual dichotomy. To make it clearer for those outside of sociology, objective structural features such as social class, gender, ethnicity, education level can be revealed through quantitative research. On the other hand, the behavioral subjective dimension of social phenomena that are constantly reproduced by the actions of individuals can only be understood through qualitative research. What is important for us is to be able to consider both objective social structures and subjective dimensions together. While reflexive sociology provides us with a theoretical basis in this quest, mixed-design research offers a concrete option.

For those of us who are trying to do relational sociology, Bourdieu [9] and his view that social life is multidimensional and consists of fields with interrelated differences is very important as a social ontology. In fact, in order to overcome the duality of structure and individual, the element of culture can be analyzed through these fields. Fields such as health, education, law and economy have their own cultures and capitals. So much so that these areas with their own cultures also function according to their own logic. Cultural meanings that are socially encoded in habitus appear spontaneously and even naturally. It can be said that the predispositions of individuals and groups are unconsciously embodied in this habitus. For example, the cultures of each social class consisting of their own tastes and tastes may be different. Although the tastes of the upper class affect the other classes, they are also affected by the lower classes. In short, while overcoming the duality of structure and individual with culture, it becomes inevitable to conduct qualitative research. Because with quantitative research, it is necessary to conduct qualitative research while examining more structural explanations and culturally differentiated behaviors. In reflexive research, the researcher must keep an epistemological distance from them so that common sense and individual behaviors do not adversely affect the research. This methodologically called «participant objectivation» is also very important as self-reflexivity. To make a connection between Elias and Weber here, it can be remembered that Weber's thought that it is possible to do objective science despite subjective preferences. As a matter of fact, Weber argued that starting with the selection of

the research problem and the appropriate theoretical framework, the researcher can still be objective by keeping a distance from the subject he/she is researching, even though he/she acts with subjective preferences (cited in [10]). Elias [11], like Weber, deals with objectivity at the level of the researcher's responsibility and a problem that he/she can solve. However, in the subjectivity and objectivity discussions, the possibility of avoiding subjectivity is highly controversial because of the identity of the examining subject arising from being a part of the society he/she examines, and this situation can never be ignored. Mixed-pattern research has been used in sociology for at least 40 years, both in the world [7,9,11] and in Turkey [2], both with quantitative statistics collected from the field or with existing documents, as well as by participating in observation and qualitative research. It should be said that this methodological pluralism has a wide variety of applications.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Efforts should be made to integrate quantitative and qualitative research in mixed design research. Integration of both theoretical approaches and collected data is the most important agenda item regarding this integration. Because it may be necessary to combine epistemological and methodological assumptions that are difficult to reconcile with each other. It is difficult even to reconcile research based on Positivist Empiricism with Pragmatism. It is not easy to get along with those who do science for the sake of science and those who are problem-oriented for the social good [12]. One of the most important issues that is often discussed in mixed-design research is how to combine or integrate quantitative and qualitative research. In addition, it is the attempt to integrate the collected data that is observed more frequently in general. However, the theoretical integration of two different studies, although neglected, is extremely important. For example, quantitative research can often start from a more macro functionalist theoretical approach. On the other hand, qualitative research may also have theoretical ties to Symbolic Interaction at a more micro level. When the literature is examined, it is observed that there are some suggestions on how to integrate research based on theoretical foundations, one on the macro and one on the micro-theoretical basis, in mixed-pattern research. For example, Tunarosa [13] suggest five strategies to ensure the integration of quantitative and qualitative in mixed-pattern research. These are respectively «conjoined», «sequential», «simultaneous», «full-cycle» and «single-logic» (mono-logic) integration.

In quantitative and qualitative research, it is possible for researchers to both create and test new theories with these conjunctions. For example, ties such as "and", "with", "as" are integrated with data collected by different research techniques. For example, while qualitative data are collected by including open-ended questions in quantitative surveys, some quantitative frequency tables can be extracted from the data collected in qualitative research. Thus, all data is analyzed, assuming that quantitative and qualitative are embedded in each other. The

important thing is not to collect data, but to analyze. Finally, the full cycle is mostly applied in new theory development or theory testing strategies. The only logic is the strategy of deciding which of the inductive or deductive logical inferences to apply in a more mixed pattern. For example, data collected by experimentation and qualitative data collected from the field can both be integrated by induction. It should be underlined that there are very few working examples on this subject. It is possible to talk about the competencies of the studies carried out in the field of education in Turkey up to a certain stage. In sociology, it would not be wrong to say that sociologists abstain from mixed-design studies because theoretical assumptions are very strong at macro or micro levels. However, in recent years, sociologists' acquaintance with Relational Sociology has increased their courage to conduct mixed-design research. Because relational sociology legitimized mixed-design research from the very beginning by rejecting both quantitative-qualitative and macro-micro and theory and practice dualities. Of course, it is not possible for everyone to have the freedom we enjoy as relational sociologists. However, it is possible for researchers with different sociological perspectives to choose from some integration options. It is especially appropriate for researchers who are prone to macro-quantitative research with Functionalist or Conflicting approaches to turn to qualitative research to deepen their data [14-18]. Likewise, it may be appropriate for symbolic interactionist or feminist studies to increase the validity and reliability of their research by collecting quantitative data with some larger samples. Mixed design studies of researchers who see and accept that reality is multi-layered will further open the way for sociology in Turkey. Another important issue in mixed-pattern research is how to write an integrated report. For this, communication with the reader is very important. Researchers must use very careful language at all stages. It is important to include as much as possible the explanations that the reader expects on issues that are often neglected, such as the advantages and disadvantages of mixed design research, validity and reliability [2].

Conclusion

Although mixed-design research has been preferred and applied in many fields, especially in education and health, in recent years, it cannot be said that such efforts are in high demand in sociology. There is no doubt that there are many reasons for this. It would not be wrong to say that one of them is the uneasiness arising from the possible difficulties in integrating the research based on different theoretical and methodological assumptions. It is also not easy to give up on paradigms as it is seen as a matter of identity. Moreover, while positivist research make deduction and macro-level analysis based on a strong theoretical framework from the very beginning, the fact that interpretive sociological researches make induction with the data collected from the field are signs that there are quite radical differences [19-23]. However, a competent scientific research methodology is a process in which both deduction and induction logical reasoning are made together. Although we begin our research as a hypothetical deductive, after collecting data from the field, we somehow deny that we make

induction to establish a relationship with the starting point. In addition, since there is no unlimited possibility of observation, we ignore that we make rational inferences with the mind while making induction. Therefore, epistemologically, there is both empiricism and rationalism at the source of our knowledge. This shows that reality is multi-layered and using more than one research design together is not a contradiction, but a necessity to make more competent analyzes and syntheses. While sociology in Turkey is a tradition that gives more weight to quantitative research within the positivist tradition, qualitative research has become widespread in fashion since the 2000s. It can be said that the last generations do not know about quantitative analysis. Interpretative sociology and cultural studies have come to the fore in all academic or non-academic studies, as if seeking revenge. On the other hand, Functionalism in macro-empirical research, Symbolic Interaction and its derivatives in micro-empirical research find the opportunity to be widely applied within sociological theoretical approaches. In addition, it is clear that conflict-based historical materialist studies at the macro level are based on documents without going into the field.

However, in recent years, in parallel with the developments all over the world, some new opportunities for sociology have emerged and it has quickly entered the field of interest of some sociologists. This innovation is referred to as Relational sociology for short and is sometimes dismissed as «old wine in a new glass» because of its complementarity to the shortcomings of previous classical mainstream sociologies. However, at the same time, it is very interesting to those who do not fit into the dress drawn by the positivist and interpretive mainstream sociology traditions. It would not be wrong to say that there are many reasons to say that relational sociology is a unique opportunity for those who want to do mixed design research. Because the rejection of dualities and essentialism is in full harmony with the rationality of mixed design studies, which are the two most fundamental features of relational sociology. While sociologists who advocate the rejection of macro-micro, structure-individual, time-space, theory-practice, quantitative-qualitative dualities carry out mixed pattern studies, relational sociology provides them with a very important basis or legitimacy. In addition, it is very important epistemologically that relational sociology is fed from pragmatism with a problem orientation. Likewise, realist ontology, which argues that reality is multi-layered, rejects essentialism and provides important foundations for both relational sociology and mixed design as a quantitative-qualitative coexistence. It is time, as sociologists, to experience that some relational sociological characteristics such as examining social processes, developing new concepts, and caring about daily life are realized more efficiently with mixed design studies. Especially to be self-reflective, conducting mixed design research with relational sociological principles can be seen as an opportunity to be enjoyable and encouraging to be more productive. There are many reasons why mixed design research, which is more applied in fields such as education, health, business administration and biology, should be applied in sociology. Relational sociologists,

in particular, are expected to work and produce more comfortably in mixed design research. There are now many reasons for the removal of old barriers. For this, it is enough just to be more willing and innovative.

References

1. Tashakkori A, Teddlie C (2003) Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research. Sage, USA.

2. Kasapoglu A (1982) Social relations of personnel in health organizations. Sociology of health: Studies from Turkey Sociological Association Pub, Turkey.

3. Mills CW (1959) Sociological Imagination. Oxford University Press, UK.

4. Bourdieu P (1978) Sport and social class. Social Sciences Information 17: 819-840.

5. Tashakkori A, Teddlie C (1998) Introduction to mixed method and mixed model studies in the social and behavioral sciences. In: Tashakkori A, Teddlie C (Eds.), Mixed Methodology: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. Sage Publications, USA, pp. 1-40.

6. Bourdieu P (2004) Science and science of reflexivity. Stanford University Press, USA.

7. Bourdieu P (1977) Outline of a theory of practice. Stanford University Press, USA.

8. Bourdieu P (1990) In other words: Essays toward reflexive sociology. Stanford University Press, USA.

9. Bourdieu P (1984) Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste. Harward University Press, USA.

10. Kasapoglu A (2016) Applied Relational Sociology. New Human.

11. Elias N (2000) The civilizing process: Sociogenetic and psychogenetic investigations. Blackwell, UK.

12. Crossley N, Edwards G (2016) Cases, mechanisms and the real: The theory and methodology of mixed-method social network analysis. Sociological Research Online 21(2).

13. Tunarosa A, Glynn MA (2016) Strategies of integration in mixed methods research: Insights using relational algorithms. Organizational Research Methods 20(2): 224-242.

14. Elias N (1977) Towards a theory of social process: Collected works. UCD, Ireland.

15. Elias N (1983) A diagnosis of present-day sociology. UCD, Ireland.

16. Elias N (1987) Involvement and detachment. Collected works. UCD, Ireland.

17. Fetterman DM (1998) Ethnography. Handbook of applied social science research methods. In: Bickman L, Rog DJ (Eds.), Sage Publications, USA, pp. 473-504.

18. Fries JC (2009) Bourdieu's reflexive sociology as a theoretical basis for mixed methods research: An application to complementary and alternative medicine. Journal of Mixed Method Research 3(4): 326-348.

19. Habermas J (1972) Knowledge and human interest. Heinemann, USA.

20. Morgan DL (1998) Practical strategies for combining qualitative and quantitative methods: Application to health research. Qual Health Res 8(3): 362-376.

21. Creswell JW, Plano Clark VL, Gutmann M, Hanson W (2003) Advanced mixed method research designs. In: Tashakkori A, Teddlie C (Eds.), Handbook on Mixed Methods in the Behavioral and Social Sciences. Sage Publications, USA, pp. 209-240.

22. Tashakkori A, Teddlie C (2007) The past and future of mixed method research: Farm Data triangulation to mixed model designs. In: Tashakkori A, Teddlie C (Eds.), Handbook on Mixed Methods in the Behavioral and Social Sciences. Sage, USA, pp. 671-701.

23. Weber M (1947) From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology. In: Gerth H, Mills CW (Eds.), Oxford University Press, UK.