Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning

CEDIL Guidelines for the conduct and reporting of mixed methods in quantitative impact evaluations

Introduction

Impact evaluation is intended to address the question of effectiveness, i.e. what difference the programme made to the outcomes of interest. This analysis is usually done using a large n statistical design, such as randomized controlled trials.

There is growing recognition that the use of mixed methods in impact evaluations can add value in various ways, allowing the study to address additional questions about programme design and implementation and thus why programmes work (or not) and how to make them work better. Mixed methods can also help frame the study, uncovering unintended outcomes or contextually-relevant ways of framing questions on social constructs. They can also help understand study findings, for example why people have not taken part in an intervention.

The idea of using mixed methods has a long tradition in social research. But it is also recognized that mixed methods are often poorly applied. In quantitative analysis, the qualitative component, if any, is often poorly designed, integrated or reported.

These guidelines are to support the design, conduct and reporting of mixed-methods in quantitative impact evaluations. That is, impact studies using a large n statistical design with a qualitative component.

The guidelines are based largely on the CEDIL inception paper by Jimenez et al. (2018), 'Mixing and matching: using qualitative methods to improve quantitative impact evaluations (IEs) and systematic reviews (SRs) of development outcomes', supplemented by a review of other relevant guidelines e.g. the CONSORT extension for development effectiveness (Bose, 2010).

This note is one of a set of guidelines that CEDIL is piloting to improve the design, implementation and use of evaluations. They will be revised based on lessons identified during the design and implementation of CEDIL-financed research projects. We welcome your feedback, which should be sent to cedil@opml.co.uk.

How to use these guidelines

The guidelines are intended to assist researchers think through how they include qualitative data and approaches in their impact design, analysis and reporting.

Characteristics of high-quality mixed methods impact evaluations and systematic reviews

Jimenez et al. (2018) developed a checklist to assess the study quality with respect to each of the quantitative component, the qualitative component and the way in which mixed methods are used. This checklist was applied to a sample of 40 studies. Analysis of the results of this exercise showed that quantitative impact evaluations that successfully integrated qualitative methods commonly have the following characteristics:

- Rigorous in applying both quantitative and qualitative methods. Studies that display both quantitative and qualitative rigour also tend to be stronger on integration.
- Provide a clear rationale for the integration of methods. Well integrated studies make clear the rationale for integration at key stages of the evaluation, and explicitly identify the value-added of doing so.
- Deploy multidisciplinary teams. Given epistemological, ontological and methodological differences in quantitative and qualitative methods, multidisciplinary teams can offer a substantive treatment to mixed methods and their integration. However, successful integration should be based on a common premise behind ideas, concepts and evaluation approach.
- Provide adequate documentation. Strong mixed method designs provide adequate documentation, be it within a report, or through supplementary reports and/or appendices.
- Acknowledge study limitations. Acknowledging the limits of integrating qualitative and quantitative findings facilitates a better understanding of the transferability of findings, and their implications in the policy domain.

These findings reinforce the potential usefulness of these guidelines. In particular, for successful mixed methods both the quantitative and qualitative components need to be well design and properly reported.

The checklist

1. Does the study have a qualitative component?	*If no, consider what role qualitative analysis might place in strengthening the study design or analysis. This checklist will help with that.*
2. Is the intervention clearly described?	*To be useful to stakeholders, and enable replication of the intervention, the intervention should be clearly described e.g. target group, how targeted, activities, governance and timeline and sequencing.*
3. Are cost data being collected and incorporated into the analysis?	*Decision-makers like information on how much it will cost to achieve the reported effect. Since unit costs can vary, it is desirable to transparently report the 'ingredients' of the costing as well as total costs.*
4. Is the study design based on an explicit theory of change?	*The theory of change supports the identification of causal linkages, assumptions to be tested and the evaluation questions.*

5. Are the research questions clearly listed? Are the questions explicitly linked to the theory of change?	*Clearly stating the research question is helpful for both thinking through whether the study design and data are appropriate and engaging stakeholders as to the purpose of the study.*
6. Is it clear which methods and which type of data are needed to answer each research question?	*The counterfactual question of the difference a programme makes is central to impact evaluations. But factual quantitative data can be important for some questions such as participation rates. And qualitative data answer questions such as barriers and facilitators and implementation issues. Qualitative data are not generally used to address the impact question.*
7. Describe the theoretical or methodological framework used to inform the qualitative analysis	*There are a variety of qualitative approaches which might be used such as grounded theory or narrative construction.*
8. Describe the role of the qualitative component of the study	*Provide the rationale for integrating quantitative and qualitative methods and the planned use of qualitative methods and data*
9. Describe the planned data qualitative data collection	*Include the sample strategy (sample size and how sample will be selected) and approach to data collection (e.g. focus groups, semi-structured interview)*
10. Describe how the qualitative will be recorded and by whom	*Will interviews, focus groups or other sessions be recorded and transcribed, notes taken during or after session?*
11. Describe how the qualitative data will be analysed	*Will any software by used, e.g. ti-Atlas, or machine learning? How will key themes be identified?*
12. Identify any limitations in the qualitative research and the actions taken to minimize the effects of these limitations	*Qualitative research is more prone to various biases, including unrepresentative samples. These possible limitations should be identified, and biases guarded against where possible.*
13. List the key findings from the qualitative data analysis	*These may include issues in the design and implementation of the intervention, barriers and facilitators of intervention success which may disproportionately affect certain groups e.g. women*

14. *Are the findings from the qualitative component incorporated into the overall study findings and any recommendations?*	*Study findings and recommendations* should be based on the evidence contained in the report. The evidence on which each finding is based should be clear.* *Note: * current approaches favour researchers presenting their findings and their implications in a clear manner but refraining from explicit recommendations.*
15. *Are any apparent contradictions between the quantitative and qualitative findings addressed?*	*Qualitative data may reveal information at odds with the quantitative data, e.g. enthusiastic response from community members to programme which is apparently not working. Such contradictions need to be explicitly addressed.*

References

Bose, Ron (2010) CONSORT Extensions for Development Effectiveness: guidelines for the reporting of randomised control trials of social and economic policy interventions in developing countries, Journal of Development Effectiveness, 2:1, 173-186, DOI: 10.1080/19439341003624441

Jimenez E, Waddington H, Goel N, Prost A, Pullin A, White H, Lahiri S, Narain A, Bhatia R, 2018 Mixing and Matching: Using Qualitative Methods to Improve Quantitative Impact Evaluations (IEs) and Systematic Reviews (SRs) of Development Outcomes CEDIL Inception Paper 5: London

Theory of change videos

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWutrZwzP18

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnxhmYTo6i0

Comments on the guidelines are welcome and should be sent to cedil@opml.co.uk.