How Lit Is It? An Analysis of Research Approaches in Health Sciences Libraries

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Introduction

Research approaches (i.e., qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods) represent different philosophical worldviews and theoretical frameworks.¹

We investigated research approaches in the health sciences library (HSL) literature between 2006-2016.

Methods

A comprehensive search was conducted in order to identify all potential research articles published in the HSL literature between January 1, 2006 - December 31, 2016 in 10 selected journal titles.

Eligibility criteria were developed from pre-established definitions of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research approaches.

Studies were categorized according to research approach or were excluded based upon eligibility criteria.

Results

1205 unique records were retrieved from all database sources. 604 studies were excluded due to not meeting the criteria for a research study. Of the remaining 601 studies, 446 (74.2%) were qualitative, 106 were quantitative (17.6%), and 49 were mixed methods (8.1%).

Conclusions

Our results indicate the majority of research in the HSL literature is qualitative in nature. Interestingly, this study conflicts previous research findings.

A high number of case studies that relied on qualitative data collection methods in our results set may partially explain this difference in results. The high number of case studies drew to our attention a problematic conflation of the terms case study and case report, confirming previous reports on this topic.²,³

References