

What Is Happening Now? An Overview of Mixed Methods Applications in Special Education

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Conducting mixed methods research studies has the potential to help researchers who represent special education to address relatively complex questions compared to monomethod research studies. Therefore, it is important to determine the prevalence of mixed methods research studies in special education, especially because the prevalence rate studies conducted in special education research are somewhat dated. Thus, a major purpose of the current study was to determine the prevalence of mixed methods research approaches among articles published between 2000 and 2015 in the leading special education journal (i.e., *Exceptional Children*). A second purpose was to contextualize this prevalence rate via what we call a meta-prevalence study, which involves identifying the prevalence of mixed methods research approaches across the array of fields and disciplines reported in the previous prevalence studies. The third purpose was to identify the characteristics (e.g., the complexity of the analyses used) identified in *Exceptional Children*. Findings revealed that the prevalence rate for mixed methods research studies published in *Exceptional Children* (i.e., 14.53%), although marginally higher than that for the fields of social and behavioral science as a whole (i.e., 11.65%), is still relatively low compared to the prevalence rate for quantitative research articles. These and other findings and their implications are presented.

Keywords: mixed methods research, prevalence rate studies, meta-prevalence rate, special education

Since the publication of the first edition of the *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research* in 2003 (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), the presence of mixed methods research studies in the published literature has increased (e.g., Ivankova & Kawamura, 2010). From that time of the landmark publication forward, several researchers (e.g., Alise & Teddlie, 2010; Powell, Mihalas, Onwuegbuzie, Suldo, & Daley, 2008) have provided insights into the utilization of mixed methods research designs across numerous fields via what Alise and Teddlie (2010) refer to as *prevalence rate studies* (i.e., “a line of inquiry into research methods in the social/behavioral sciences [referring to the proportion of articles using a particular methodological approach],” p. 104). Alise and Teddlie (2010) provided the following explanation:

Researchers examining prevalence rates are interested in determining the percentage of QUAN [quantitative], QUAL [qualitative],

and MM [mixed methods] research studies that occur within different disciplines across the social sciences. These rates are especially important to individuals interested in MM, because they indicate the degree of awareness that researchers in different disciplines have of the utility of MM research and how it can be used to uniquely answer certain types of questions in their areas of study. (p. 104)

Additionally, Alise and Teddlie (2010) stated that these *prevalence rate studies* help researchers to “determine if the paradigm wars have subsided in selected disciplines by assessing (a) the prevalence rates of MM [mixed methods] in those fields and (b) the degree to which disciplines are still dominated by the traditional postpositivist QUAN [quantitative] approaches” (p. 107). Alise and Teddlie (2010) further concluded the following:

As more research evidence accumulates, we will get a better picture of the overall prevalence rates of MM throughout the social/behavioral sciences and how that evolves over time. These prevalence rates studies are crucial at this time for mixed methodologists because they allow us to understand how MM techniques are spreading across a variety of disciplines and how they are evolving as they expand into areas where

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