

# Research and Program Evaluation Practice Exam (Sample)

## Study Guide



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## **Questions**

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- 1. What is a critical difference between formative and summative evaluation?**
  - A. Formative evaluation occurs after program completion; summative occurs during implementation**
  - B. Formative evaluation is focused on ongoing improvement; summative centers on final outcomes**
  - C. Both evaluations measure the same aspects of a program**
  - D. Summative evaluation focuses solely on stakeholder feedback**
- 2. Survey research and longitudinal studies require \_\_\_\_\_ sample sizes, which can be challenging to obtain.**
  - A. small**
  - B. large**
  - C. moderate**
  - D. very small**
- 3. The term that describes the consistency of a treatment or intervention is \_\_\_\_\_.**
  - A. validity**
  - B. fidelity**
  - C. reliability**
  - D. replication**
- 4. What research design is characterized by observing changes over time in a single group?**
  - A. cross-sectional**
  - B. cohort**
  - C. longitudinal**
  - D. case-control**
- 5. Which research approach combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore a research question?**
  - A. Qualitative research**
  - B. Mixed methods research**
  - C. Quantitative research**
  - D. Descriptive research**

- 6. Define "findings" in the context of program evaluation reports.**
- A. Recommendations for future programs**
  - B. The results and conclusions drawn from the evaluation data analyzed**
  - C. A summary of the evaluation activities conducted**
  - D. Data collection methods utilized during the evaluation**
- 7. The social sciences, and counseling research in particular, are dependent on \_\_\_\_ at a human level.**
- A. replicability**
  - B. dependability**
  - C. consistency**
  - D. reliability**
- 8. Which philosophical stance is most aligned with the scientific method?**
- A. Participatory action research**
  - B. Consensual qualitative research**
  - C. Positivism**
  - D. Critical theory**
- 9. Who is typically considered a stakeholder in program evaluation?**
- A. Only the program implementers**
  - B. Any individual or group interested in the program's outcomes**
  - C. Only government agencies that fund the program**
  - D. Individuals who are not directly involved in the program**
- 10. What is a primary characteristic of mixed-methods research?**
- A. Use of a single method**
  - B. Integration of different data sources**
  - C. Focus on theoretical frameworks**
  - D. Strict adherence to qualitative methods**

## **Answers**

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1. B
2. B
3. B
4. C
5. B
6. B
7. C
8. C
9. B
10. B

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## **Explanations**

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1. What is a critical difference between formative and summative evaluation?
- A. Formative evaluation occurs after program completion; summative occurs during implementation
  - B. Formative evaluation is focused on ongoing improvement; summative centers on final outcomes**
  - C. Both evaluations measure the same aspects of a program
  - D. Summative evaluation focuses solely on stakeholder feedback

The critical difference highlighted by the correct choice is that formative evaluation is primarily concerned with ongoing improvement throughout the course of a program, while summative evaluation is focused on assessing the final outcomes after the program has been implemented. Formative evaluation typically takes place during the development or implementation phases. Its purpose is to provide continuous feedback that can help shape and enhance the program, ensuring that it meets its goals effectively. On the other hand, summative evaluation is conducted after the program's completion to determine its effectiveness and impact, assessing whether the intended outcomes have been achieved. This type of evaluation often involves evaluating the overall success and making decisions about program continuation or modification based on the results. Understanding this distinction is essential for program evaluators, as it helps them choose the appropriate evaluation approach for different stages of a program's lifecycle and understand the implications of the findings for program improvement and decision-making processes.

2. Survey research and longitudinal studies require \_\_\_\_\_ sample sizes, which can be challenging to obtain.
- A. small
  - B. large**
  - C. moderate
  - D. very small

In survey research and longitudinal studies, large sample sizes are essential to ensure the findings are statistically significant and generalizable to the wider population. Large sample sizes help in achieving a more accurate estimate of population parameters, reducing sampling error and increasing the reliability of the results. This is particularly important when trying to capture the effects of variables over time in longitudinal studies, as well as addressing the variability that naturally occurs in different populations. Large samples allow researchers to identify trends and patterns more effectively, as they provide a more comprehensive representation of the population being studied. Moreover, when dealing with diverse subgroups within a population, larger sample sizes ensure that there are enough respondents in each subgroup to allow for meaningful comparisons and analyses. As a result, collecting large sample sizes is a common challenge in both survey and longitudinal research, but it is necessary for reducing bias and enhancing the robustness of the research findings.

**3. The term that describes the consistency of a treatment or intervention is \_\_\_\_.**

**A. validity**

**B. fidelity**

**C. reliability**

**D. replication**

The term that describes the consistency of a treatment or intervention is fidelity. Fidelity refers to the degree to which an intervention is implemented as intended, without deviations or modifications that might alter its effectiveness. In research and program evaluation, ensuring high fidelity is crucial because it ensures that the intervention is delivered in a way that is true to its original design. This includes adherence to protocols, proper training of facilitators, and the appropriate timing and dosage of the intervention. When fidelity is assessed, it helps researchers and evaluators understand whether observed outcomes can be attributed to the intervention itself and whether it functions as intended in practice. High fidelity is important for drawing valid conclusions about the effectiveness of the treatment or intervention, as variations could compromise both the reliability and validity of the results.

**4. What research design is characterized by observing changes over time in a single group?**

**A. cross-sectional**

**B. cohort**

**C. longitudinal**

**D. case-control**

The correct response is characterized by tracking a single group over an extended period to observe changes and developments in their characteristics, behaviors, or outcomes. This design is particularly effective in understanding trends and the effects of time on the specific group in question. For instance, researchers might use this method to study how a particular intervention impacts health outcomes by consistently measuring the same participants at various time points. In contrast, cross-sectional designs capture data at a single point in time, cohort designs often involve comparing multiple groups across time rather than focusing on a single group, and case-control studies look retrospectively at individuals with a specific outcome and compare them to those without it, rather than tracking changes over time. Each of these alternative designs serves different research purposes and benefits but does not emphasize the continuous observation of a single group as effectively as the longitudinal design does.

**5. Which research approach combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore a research question?**

- A. Qualitative research**
- B. Mixed methods research**
- C. Quantitative research**
- D. Descriptive research**

Mixed methods research is a research approach that intentionally integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research question. This approach is particularly valuable because it allows researchers to explore complex phenomena through different lenses. Qualitative methods can offer in-depth insights into participants' experiences, perspectives, and motivations, while quantitative methods can provide statistical evidence that can help validate findings and assess the extent of phenomena. By combining these methods, researchers can capture the richness of qualitative data alongside the generalizability of quantitative data, leading to more robust and nuanced conclusions. In contrast, qualitative research focuses primarily on understanding concepts, thoughts, or experiences without statistical analysis, whereas quantitative research emphasizes numerical data and statistical analysis. Descriptive research, while useful for providing a snapshot of a phenomenon, does not inherently involve the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods. Hence, mixed methods research stands out as the correct choice for an approach that synthesizes both types of data to enrich the investigation of a research question.

**6. Define "findings" in the context of program evaluation reports.**

- A. Recommendations for future programs**
- B. The results and conclusions drawn from the evaluation data analyzed**
- C. A summary of the evaluation activities conducted**
- D. Data collection methods utilized during the evaluation**

In the context of program evaluation reports, "findings" refers specifically to the results and conclusions that emerge from the analysis of the evaluation data. This encompasses the insights gained from quantitative and qualitative assessments and highlights the effectiveness, impact, or outcomes of the program being evaluated. Findings serve as a critical component because they summarize what the evaluation reveals about the program's performance and efficacy, providing stakeholders with essential information to inform decision-making. These findings are typically supported by data and help illuminate trends, patterns, or relationships observed during the evaluation process. While recommendations, summaries of activities, and data collection methods are important aspects of a comprehensive evaluation report, they do not constitute the "findings" themselves. Recommendations may arise from the findings but are a separate element aimed at guiding future actions. Similarly, a summary of evaluation activities and data collection methods provides context but does not delve into the outcomes or conclusions drawn from the gathered data. Thus, the core understanding of "findings" revolves around the actual results and conclusions derived from the evaluation process.

**7. The social sciences, and counseling research in particular, are dependent on \_\_\_\_ at a human level.**

- A. replicability**
- B. dependability**
- C. consistency**
- D. reliability**

The correct answer emphasizes the importance of maintaining stable and uniform results over time when conducting research in social sciences and counseling. Consistency ensures that the findings of a study can be trusted and applied across different contexts or subjects. In counseling research, this is particularly crucial, as understanding human behavior often requires a reliable basis to interpret varying responses adequately. Consistency enables researchers to repeat studies and arrive at similar conclusions, reflecting the inherent stability and predictability of human behavior. When researchers find consistent results, it strengthens the validity of their conclusions and enhances the robustness of their theories. While other terms like replicability, dependability, and reliability have their significance in research, they do not capture the essence of the human dimension in the same way. Replicability focuses on whether a study can be repeated with the same results by different researchers, dependability deals with the auditability and trustworthiness of the research process, and reliability denotes the extent to which measurement tools yield stable responses over time. Each of these concepts relates to the overall rigor of research but does not directly address the need for uniformity in human-related studies as effectively as consistency does.

**8. Which philosophical stance is most aligned with the scientific method?**

- A. Participatory action research**
- B. Consensual qualitative research**
- C. Positivism**
- D. Critical theory**

The philosophical stance that is most aligned with the scientific method is positivism. Positivism emphasizes that knowledge is derived from empirical evidence and observable phenomena, which is a cornerstone of the scientific method. This approach relies on rigorous testing, measurement, and the validation of hypotheses through experimentation and observation. In a positivist framework, researchers assert that objective reality exists and can be understood through systematic investigation, making it highly compatible with the principles of the scientific method. This stance values quantitative data and statistical analysis, often focusing on generalizable findings that contribute to theory development. Participatory action research, consensual qualitative research, and critical theory each have distinct emphases that diverge from the strict empirical focus of positivism. Participatory action research centers on collaboration and empowering participants in the research process, while consensual qualitative research emphasizes consensus among researchers and participants regarding meanings ascribed to data. Critical theory seeks to challenge and change social structures and power dynamics, placing less emphasis on the objective analysis typical of positivist approaches. Thus, positivism's adherence to empirical evidence and objective analysis distinctly positions it as the philosophical stance that aligns most closely with the scientific method.

**9. Who is typically considered a stakeholder in program evaluation?**

**A. Only the program implementers**

**B. Any individual or group interested in the program's outcomes**

**C. Only government agencies that fund the program**

**D. Individuals who are not directly involved in the program**

The answer is focused on the broad definition of stakeholders in program evaluation. Stakeholders are any individuals or groups that have an interest in the program's outcomes, which can include a wide range of participants. This encompasses program implementers, beneficiaries, funders, community members, and even external evaluators. Their perspectives and evaluations are crucial, as they can provide valuable insights into the program's effectiveness and impact, influencing future program decisions and improvements. In contrast, defining stakeholders too narrowly, as seen in the other choices, limits the understanding of who can influence or be affected by the program. For instance, only considering program implementers excludes essential insights from beneficiaries or the broader community. Focusing solely on government agencies dismisses non-governmental stakeholders whose interests may significantly affect the program. Lastly, acknowledging only those individuals who are not directly involved does not recognize the importance of those directly engaged in or impacted by the program. This broad stakeholder definition helps ensure that the evaluation process is comprehensive and inclusive, ultimately leading to better outcomes and recommendations.

**10. What is a primary characteristic of mixed-methods research?**

**A. Use of a single method**

**B. Integration of different data sources**

**C. Focus on theoretical frameworks**

**D. Strict adherence to qualitative methods**

The primary characteristic of mixed-methods research is the integration of different data sources. This approach combines qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a more comprehensive view of a research problem. By blending these two types of data, researchers can leverage the strengths and mitigate the weaknesses of each method, leading to more robust findings and a deeper understanding of the research questions. Mixed-methods research allows for a richer data set, as qualitative data can provide context to numerical findings, and quantitative data can validate or expand upon qualitative insights. This approach is particularly useful in exploring complex issues, where a single method might overlook important elements. The emphasis on integration means that the research design intentionally combines and synthesizes multiple perspectives, often leading to more insightful conclusions than either method could achieve on its own.