

Dissertation Critique

Introduction Analysis

This paper includes an in-depth critique of the dissertation written by Tran (2019) and entitled *Evaluating the Impact of the North Carolina Art Therapy Institute's Newcomers Program*. The author starts the paper with a description of the background of the problem providing the exact definition of the term newcomer and refugee or asylum seeker. This precision is instrumental in the operationalization of the basic concepts of the research. Tran (2019) considers the challenges refugees face in new countries with a focus on their mental health and provides a detailed description of the existing art-based programs. The provision of background information is one of the primary milestones of dissertation writing (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Hence, it is possible to note that the dissertation in question has a strong beginning and proper description of the background and setting.

The purpose of the study is provided at the end of the introduction, but it is not properly highlighted or articulated. The author does not use any subheadings or even a separate paragraph to explicitly formulate the purpose of the study, which creates certain confusion. At that, being explicit is one of the major objectives for researchers writing their dissertations (Felix & Smith, 2019). The purpose of the study under analysis is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Newcomers Art Therapy Program developed for resettled refugee children and adolescents by the North Carolina Art Therapy Institute.

Tran (2019) does not mention the research questions to be addressed or hypotheses to be checked in the introduction section, which is a significant limitation of the dissertation. Guiding research questions or hypotheses should be made explicit in the introduction to help the reader to follow easily (Felix & Smith, 2019). This important set of information is provided only in the

methodology section and will be discussed later. The introduction ends with a brief description of the major parts of the dissertation and their content, which is a common and helpful format for dissertations, making them concise and easy to follow.

Analysis of the Review of Literature

The paper under consideration does not include a specific section where the literature is properly reviewed. The author referred to diverse reputable sources throughout the paper to support major claims. The majority of the used sources are recent, and the oldest ones are concerned with methodology. However, Tran (2019) did not use a consistent format throughout the dissertation, making quite serious mistakes. For instance, many direct quotes are given without mentioning particular page numbers, making it difficult for the reader to evaluate the reliability of the information. Moreover, Tran (2019) did not always provide references to the exact sources, referring to abstracts available online as in the case with the book by Hogan (2016). Such uses of sources and inconsistent referencing undermine the validity of supporting literature and can even make the author's claims seem less valid and evidence-based.

Analysis of Methodology Section

Study Design

The section devoted to the description of the methodology can be seen as the strongest one in the dissertation under examination. Tran (2019) provided an in-depth description of the methods utilized to address the research questions that are also highlighted in this section. Notably, the researcher did not explicitly provide a set of research questions that were to be addressed by the study. However, they are still mentioned at the beginning of the methodology section. The author aimed at exploring whether the summer-camp- and school-based Newcomers Programs had effects on participants. Tran (2019) also aimed at comparing the short camp-based project to an existing

longer school-based program.

The convergent mixed methods designed study was employed to address the abovementioned questions. This study design encompasses the collection of quantitative and qualitative data separately and the use of triangulation to validate these types of information by analyzing quantitative and qualitative data together (Demir & Pismek, 2018). Tran (2019) utilized an experimental study design to evaluate the effectiveness of the Newcomers Program. The present methodology is an appropriate choice to answer the posed research questions and address the purpose of the study. The use of either quantitative or qualitative design would limit the scope of the current study, making it focused on some rates or themes respectively. As mentioned above, Tran (2019) described the employed methods in detail, so the held experiment is highlighted, and the elements of the convergent mixed methods are visible.

Population

The section regarding the study population and selection process contains all the necessary details, but the information is presented in a text form, which makes it harder to perceive. The dissertation would benefit from the use of demographic data tables in this part, as this approach is common due to its clarity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The overall number of the participants was 102 children (31 children involved in the camp-based program and 71 individuals who took part in the school-based project) and seven therapists (six therapists and one intern). The control group consisted of the children who participated in the school-based project, and the experimental group was the participants of camp-based program. The sample size is appropriate for the current study as it involved all the children who were involved of the camp-based project. The selection of children can be seen as unbiased, while Tran (2019) utilized the purposive sampling when recruiting therapists, so this portion of the selection process can be regarded as somewhat biased. The

therapists could be motivated to participate in research, which could have affected their answers.

Instrumentation

Tran (2019) described instruments giving a detailed account of the quantitative part and providing only basic data regarding the qualitative part of the study. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) + Impact was utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of the two programs and comparing them. The author justified the use of this tool by the fact that this questionnaire is generally used when assessing the Art Therapy Institute's projects (Tran, 2019). The author also refers to other studies where similar instruments are employed. The questionnaires are validated by other studies. The researcher describes the tool, and it is possible to note that it is appropriate for answering the set questions. It is not clear whether the researcher ensured the reliability and validity of the instrument by using a pilot study or other measures.

The qualitative data collection instrument does not seem properly validated. It is mentioned that interviews and focus group discussions were implemented. Tran (2019) outlined the topics that were covered in the questions that were given in the appendix. Nevertheless, the validation of the questions was not described (or held) as no data concerning a pilot study or any type of validation was provided in the dissertation. At that, the questions seem appropriate for addressing the set research questions.

Data Collection

The data collection process was properly described by the author, who included all the necessary data. For instance, the held procedures (including the duration of interviews and discussions, as well as programs per se) were highlighted in detail. Tran (2019) described the inclusion and exclusion criteria stressing that parents completed questionnaires and participated in the interviews. They were the proxies who evaluated the outcomes of the programs on their

children's mental health, which is appropriate for the current study that involved quite vulnerable age groups (children aged between 4 and 14). Importantly, parents with low English proficiency still took part in the research as the questionnaires were in several languages, while parents proficient in English helped in implementing interviews and discussions. All the relevant permissions and cautions were taken to safeguard participants' rights and safety.

Data Analysis

This section contains a detailed description of the procedures that were employed. Word Excel was the software used for calculations, and the data was inserted manually (Tran, 2019). A t-test was utilized to compare the difference in the scores of the programs. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the demographic data of the participants. Qualitative data were transcribed manually, and the thematic analysis was conducted. NVivo software was employed for qualitative data analysis. These measures are common for such type of studies and are appropriate for addressing the put research questions. Since the sample size is comparatively small, and the bulk of data is moderate, the used procedures can be seen as proper.

The Analysis of Findings

The section devoted to the results of the study is another strong part of the dissertation, especially its quantitative component. The three questions were answered, and the author made this in an explicit way. The presentation of findings is also appropriate as the author included tables to make numerical data easy to understand. All the values were also highlighted with the needed commentaries. As far as qualitative data is concerned, Tran (2019) provided direct quotes, which is important for data validation. The use of as many details as possible when describing findings is critical for further validation of study results and made conclusions (Fisher & Robinson, 2020). The author did not provide a succinct summary of the findings at the end but included some discussion

of the results, which is not appropriate for the chapter devoted to findings.

The Analysis of Discussion and Conclusion

The discussion section starts with a description of results, and certain interpretation is provided. Tran (2019) stated that the programs had a modest impact on children, which could be explained by the lack of time and structure of the projects, as well as the severity of the health condition. The author paid considerable attention to the limitations of the study, which could be highlighted in less detail. The limitations included poor communication with therapists and flaws in methodology. The conclusion is quite a weak section as it is too broad. The author also fails to describe properly the areas of further research, which makes it problematic to identify the exact place of the present dissertation in the bulk of studies regarding art therapy. All in all, it is possible to state that the dissertation in question has many weaknesses. The author did not follow many conventions of dissertation writing, which made the paper seem unconcise and sometimes confusing.

References

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