

Methodological preparation of Public Administration Scholars in South Africa

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First received 26/09/13

Accepted for publication 07/02/14

ABSTRACT

Universities' methodological preparation of students is blamed for the poor state of South African Public Administration research. This article reports on an investigation on the kind of research preparation provided by the three South African universities, which publish the most Public Administration peer-reviewed articles. The assessment of the research preparation of future Public Administration scholars focused on the purpose, content and nature of the tuition material used at the selected universities. As such, this article is an original contribution to the limited scholarship in South African Public Administration literature on this topic. The assessment revealed that tuition aims to prepare future scholars in the use of mainly quantitative research methods through separate modules on a predominantly conceptual level. This methodological emphasis has shown to be not related to the methodological preferences of the scholars affiliated to these institutions as evident when reporting research in published articles. This article shows that scholars do not necessarily prefer the same methods and techniques which are emphasised in their university training. The article provides suggestions on how the preparation of students can be improved.

INTRODUCTION

In a recent article on the future of teaching research in the social sciences, Wagner (2009: 831) observes that some researchers link their own identity as social researchers to a particular paradigm (for example qualitative or quantitative research) and related methodologies. Consequently, they tend to choose a method within their preferred paradigm first, and then make the research problem and design fit in with that method (Wagner 2009:831). The implication of this is that researchers are seemingly not so much concerned with how a particular method fits a specific problem (Patton 1996:xxii), but rather with accommodating their pre-selected methods. These observations are especially relevant for South African Public Administration research as two recent studies of articles authored by South African scholars (Cameron and McLaverty 2008:87; Wessels 2010:541) revealed the existence of a relatively low preference (10% and below) for quantitative research methods. Based on this lack of preference for quantitative methods and an overwhelming preference for desktop research methods, Cameron and McLaverty (2008:91) conclude, 'Public Administration research is in a parlous state.'

The reason for the methodological preference of South African Public Administration researchers might be researchers' attachment to a specific paradigm (Wagner 2009:831). However, Cameron and McLaverty (2008:92) blame methodological preferences in this discipline on inter alia the teaching of Public Administration research methodology at South African universities. Both possibilities, namely paradigm preference and teaching, may be supported by a study by Wessels (2010:542–545), showing that an association exists between the selected research methods and the scholars' institutional affiliation. If the paradigmatic explanation of Wagner (2009:831), is accepted as reason for the methodological preferences of South African Public Administration scholars, one would expect these preferences to be instilled in the methodological preparation of their students. As universities' methodological preparation (training) of students is blamed for the poor state of South African Public Administration research (Cameron and McLaverty 2008:91–92), this article will report on an investigation of the methodology training being provided by these institutions. For the purpose of this article, the concept 'institutional affiliation' means 'institutional methodological preparation' (Houston and Delevan 1990:680). In novice researchers, institutional methodological preparation may also imply instilling a specific research paradigm (see exposition of term in 'research paradigm' in Wessels and Thani 2014:157). This article reports on an investigation guided by the following research question: What kind of research preparation do the three leading publishing Public Administration universities in South Africa provide? Based on the answer obtained from this research

question, this article will reflect on how the preparation of students can be improved. As a similar study was not reported in any Public Administration scholarly journal (at least in South Africa), this article makes a new contribution to the limited literature on research methodology education in the South African Public Administration fraternity.

In order to contextualise this article within the South African Public Administration scholarship, an overview of recent research on the methodological preferences of South African Public Administration researchers will be presented followed by a review of literature on the methodological preparation of researchers in order to determine the key questions for the subsequent document analysis. This analysis has been done regarding the content descriptors of the Public Administration research methodology modules used at the three selected universities.

BACKGROUND: METHODOLOGICAL PREFERENCES OF SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RESEARCHERS

A recent study on the relevance of South African Public Administration research suggested that some of the articles published in three peer-reviewed journals may lack relevancy due to the selection of inappropriate research methods (Wessels 2013:89). A follow-up study showed that the selection of research methods by researchers may be influenced by researchers' institutional affiliation (Wessels 2010:545) and not necessarily by their research topic.

For the two studies referred to above, 406 articles published in the three local journals accredited by the Department of Higher Education (*Journal of Public Administration*, *Politeia* and *Administratio Publica*) were analysed. For the purpose of the current article, the analysis only focused on authors attached to the three South African universities publishing the most articles in these journals (Wessels 2010:543).

The analysis revealed that it is possible to distinguish a distinct pattern of methodological preference of researchers affiliated to each local university in comparison to the average for the total sample of 406 articles. Table 1 gives an identification of the Public Administration methodological profile for each of the three selected universities based on the methodological preference of the authors affiliated to them. The methodological profiles are determined by comparing the preference of the authors per institution with the average of the total sample. Where the preference is above the average, it is regarded as an institutional preference for a particular method, and where it is below the average, it is regarded as an institutional preference not to use the particular method.

Table 1: The methodological profiles of Public Administration authors affiliated to three South African universities compared with the combined average of the total sample of 406 articles evaluated (Wessels 2010: 542–544)

Methodological preferences	Average for total sample	University 1		University 2		University 3	
		Higher than average	Lower than average	Higher than average	Lower than average	Higher than average	Lower than average
Quantitative data collection	7,6%		4,7%		2,7%		6,3%
Hermeneutical studies using mainly scholarly text	30,9%	41,9%		35,1%		34,4%	
Qualitative research using mainly official texts for programme and policy evaluation	34,7%	41,9%		37,8%			28,1%
Qualitative data collection studying people and their behaviour by means of participant observation, case studies and unstructured interviews	6,4%		0		2,7%		6,3%
Conceptual studies	16,5%		4,7%	18,9%		25,6%	
Secondary data analysis	3%	4,7%			2,7%		0
Comparative studies	0,8%	2,3%			0		0

Table 1 shows that the authors affiliated to all three selected universities have a below average preference for collecting primary data by means of either quantitative or qualitative research methods. These authors have shown to have higher than average preference for hermeneutical methods and the study of mainly scholarly texts. If one accept the view of Wagner (2009:831) that researcher's methodological preference is determined by their attachment to a specific paradigm, one could thus expect that the methodological training provided by all three institutions to their Public Administration students would have reflect their preferred methodological paradigm by having a strong hermeneutical emphasis and attend more superficially to the empirical methods.

Scholars¹ affiliated to University 1 and University 2 have shown to produce higher than average research output making use of methods for qualitative secondary data analysis (using mainly texts for programme and policy evaluation), while scholars affiliated to University 2 and University 3 have shown a higher than average preference for conceptual studies. One can thus also rightfully expect the methodological training provided by University 1 and University 2 pays above average attention to the preparation of their students for programme and policy analysis, while one can expect from the methodological training provided by University 2 and University 3 to pay above average attention to conceptual studies (studies mainly of a philosophical nature analysing the meaning of words, concepts and arguments). In order to compile an appropriate framework for this research profile with the actual methodological preparation provided by these institutions to developing scholars, the next section will review recent scholarship on the methodological preparation of researchers.

METHODOLOGICAL PREPARATION OF RESEARCHERS: REVIEW OF SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

The purpose of this section is to identify key questions from the literature to apply for the assessment of the curriculum content descriptors of modules providing methodological training for Public Administration scholars at the three selected universities. A search on the various online library subject data bases for key words 'research method', 'research method training', 'research method teaching' and 'public administration research method' revealed that, although there are numerous scholarly articles on research methodology, articles on the teaching of, or training in research methods (especially in South Africa) are limited. However, two recent articles by Schultze (2009:992–1008) and Wagner (2009:826–838) are noteworthy from a

South African and a general social sciences perspective. From a Public Administration perspective, the contributions of Aguado (2009:251–260),

Brewer, Douglas, Facer and O'Toole (1999:373–382), Fitzpatrick (2000:173–181), Parker (2010:121–125) and Raagas (2006) helped to give a broad overview of the international discourse (mainly from the United States of America) on teaching research methods to Public Administration students. This discourse mainly focuses on three themes, namely the purpose, content and nature of methodological preparation.

Purpose of methodological preparation

There are currently two schools of thought about the purpose of knowledge: knowledge production and the function of research in society (Wagner 2009:826). The first school makes provision for what is called Mode 1 knowledge, and the knowledge and research systems are discipline-based (Wagner 2009:828). The Mode 1 knowledge school advocates epistemology and the need to understand scientific knowledge, and covers the important issues in the methodology literature (Aguado 2009:251–252). The Mode 2 knowledge school makes provision for knowledge that emphasises addressing the demands of the practice (Wagner 2009:828). This knowledge school tends to use practitioner-oriented methods including data gathering, analysis via a statistical software package (SPSS) and learning the language of social science research (Aguado 2009:251–252). These schools result in a twofold purpose for methodological preparation of Public Administration scholars, namely firstly to give a purely academic methodological preparation to future researchers, and secondly to give a methodological preparation meeting the requirements of society and the vocations for which students are prepared (Raagas 2006:699; Wagner 2009:826 & 833). We assume that the shared purposes of teaching research methods, irrespective whether it is academic- or practitioner-oriented, are to enable researchers to utilise research results, to be capable consumers of it, and to use critical thinking skills (Fitzpatrick 2000:175). However, an analysis of the content descriptors of research methodology modules is needed to establish whether these modules at the three selected universities are primarily aimed at preparing future researchers or practitioners.

Content of methodological preparation

The research methodological preparation of scholars in the social sciences usually covers one or more of the following methodological categories: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Fitzpatrick 2000:178; Parker 2010:122; Schultze 2009:178; Wagner 2009:833). It seems that structured methodology modules generally tend to cover at least all three methodological categories.

The category 'Quantitative research methods', referring to experimental methods, survey methods, quantitative data analysis, and statistics (Parker 2010:122) has shown to be one of the core methodological categories in the social sciences. Schultze (2009:997–998), for example, indicates that ample attention is given to quantitative research designs and methods in the preparation of scholars for educational research. With regard to the Master of Public Administration (MPA) course offered at Xavier University in the Philippines, Raagas (2006:699) observes that MPA programmes do include courses in statistics for Public Administration. DeLorenzo (2001:140) is even more prescriptive as he states, 'all public administration students should be properly trained in NHST [null hypothesis significant testing]'. Gill and Meier (2000:157, 163–173) clearly hold a different opinion on this technique as they argue that the technique of null hypothesis significant testing should be avoided as it 'inhibits the exploration of competing research hypotheses' and its failing 'to reject the null hypothesis essentially provides almost no information about the state of the world' (Gill and Meier 2000:171). However, Fitzpatrick (2000:178) indicates that it is required from her MPA students to select the appropriate statistical tests to answer a question that lends itself to quantitative data collection, to feel confident and comfortable with manipulating data, to interpret the statistical results of their research and to discuss their implications. It is thus evident that it can be expected from universities not only to instil knowledge about quantitative data collection and analysis to their students, but also especially to prepare them to apply these methods and techniques skilfully.

The literature also indicates (to a lesser extent than with quantitative research methods) that qualitative research methods are applied in the social sciences in general (Schultze 2009:997–98; Wagner 2009:833) and more specifically in Public Administration (Wessels 2010:540–541). These methods include inter alia empirical methods used to study people and their behaviour in a non-quantitative way by means of participant observation studies and unstructured interviews, as well as the various methods and techniques for the study of mainly documentary sources for the purpose of programme and policy analysis (Wessels 2010:540).

The use of the so-called mixed method designs has also become common in the social sciences (Schultze 2009:178). These designs enable the implementation of pragmatic solutions for research and social problems by using a combination of methods within the quantitative and qualitative categories – whichever is the most suitable for the specific research problem (Wagner 2009:833).

From the literature discussed above, it seems that the content of research methodology modules needs to be scrutinised for the presence of methods

within the quantitative and qualitative methodological categories. With regard to quantitative methods and techniques, specific attention will be given for the presence of training in the various statistical techniques. As the reading of the literature indicated that the nature of the methodological preparation or training influences the learning that takes place, the next section will give a brief theoretical perspective for assessing the methodological preparation of scholars.

Nature of methodological preparation

The purpose of this section is not only to review briefly the literature on how methodology preparation can take place, but also to identify key questions to be applied in the documentary study. The review of scholarly articles on the nature of methodological preparation of scholars reveals two basic patterns, namely a separate research methodology module (Schultze 2009:997–998) and an integrated approach where research methods are taught as part of the subject-specific modules (Fitzpatrick 2000:174; Parker 2010:124–125).

Where separate modules are used in the teaching of research methodology, the literature indicated that the use of well-prepared tuition material and real-life problems in public administration together with common statistical software are used to overcome the barriers in the learning of especially quantitative research methods (Raagas 2006:706). Raagas further indicates that by using problem-based data analysis from their field of practice, the learning of quantitative methods among practitioners doing the Master of Public Administration (MPA) programme is enhanced (Raagas 2006:706). Schultze (2009:997–998) who writes from an Education Studies perspective on teaching research methodology through distance education has identified the use of assignments to help students acquire the necessary skills to prepare them for the portfolio module and dissertation of limited scope.

Fitzpatrick (2000:177) used the following approach to teach research methods to MPA students (mainly practitioners) at the University of Colorado in Denver. Firstly, students are required to read published research and technical reports. Secondly, they are assigned to search research literature to find research on a topic of interest to them. Thirdly, students identify research questions relevant to their work or to other modules or courses in their MPA programme. Fourthly, students are exposed to fewer topics but in depth to become more confident and competent in using specific methods. It seems thus, that a separate research module does not necessarily imply that the teaching of research methods teaching is sterile and unrelated to the practice of the student. The teaching approach on which Fitzpatrick (2000) reports, integrates the learning of research methodology skills with solving real-life problems in the student's world of work.

The literature review has shown that one of the characteristics of a tuition model where the learning of research methods is integrated with the content modules of the programme is the absence of a separate research methodology module (Parker 2010:124). In fact, Parker (2010:124–125) reports that universities with the most rigorous methodological training do not separate research methods from practice. In this regard, he writes that integrated undergraduate research training ‘is required of all students and is assumed to constitute a fundamental part of a social science degree that is neither optional nor restricted to more academically able students’ (Parker 2010:124–125). This hands-on approach thus requires students to do research and to integrate their research with their learning (Aguado 2009:259).

The implication of the above observation is that it does not really matter whether research training occurs through a separate module or integrated with the content modules, as long as the learning of research methods is integrated with the real-life problems related to the subject content. An aspect that has become evident from the literature review is that statistical competence is an essential ingredient of social science research competence. Fitzpatrick (2000:174) states that at the University of Colorado in Denver they teach research methods and statistics to public administration practitioners to help them become critical thinkers. Statistics is thus an integral part of their MPA curriculum and their students are exposed to user-friendly software with real databases and they are encouraged to play around with the data and to perform various analyses for the same hypotheses (Fitzpatrick 2000:180). Statistics are not taught as a separate clinical module, but integrated with the main content of the programme.

The next section reports on an assessment of the content descriptors of postgraduate Public Administration research methodology modules of the three selected universities for their purpose, content and the nature of preparation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY MODULES AT THREE SELECTED UNIVERSITIES: AN OVERVIEW OF PURPOSE, CONTENT AND MODE OF TUITION

This overview of the tuition provided at three selected South African universities is based on an assessment of the content descriptors of Public Administration research methodology modules of the three universities. This section will first provide a brief description of the methods applied for the assessment, followed by a report on the assessment directed by the following three questions derived from the review of scholarly literature:

- What is primary purpose of the methodological preparation provided by the university?

- What is the content of the methodological preparation provided by the university?
- What is the nature of the preparation provided by the university?

Methods applied for the purpose of the assessment

The assessment is based on printed modular study material for teaching research methods honours and master's Public Administration students in 2010 and 2011. To assist with the assessment of these documents, the qualitative data analysis programme ATLAS.ti was used. In the process, the content of the study material was coded according to the steps for open coding discussed by Strauss and Corbin (1990:61–74). These documents (see Attachment 1 for a list of the material used) were coded according to a basic list of codes identified through the review of literature. Strauss and Corbin (1990:63) refer to this as conceptualising of data. During the process of coding the material, additional codes have been added where appropriate, and categories have been formed and named (Strauss and Corbin 1990:63). The first assessment category is the primary purpose of the methodological preparation and is reported on in the section that follows.

Primary purpose of the methodological preparation

There are fundamentally two possible purposes, namely to prepare future scholars or researchers, and to prepare practitioners (Raagas 2006:699; Wagner 2009:828). The other permutations seem to be combinations of these two purposes.

The assessment of the printed material (study guides) for research methodology used at University 1 revealed the following: The honours level module Administrative Theory (University 1:2011a) and master's-level module Research Methodology (University 1:2011b) are not only compulsory for students enrolled for the particular degree, but also specifically aimed at the scholarly preparation of students for inter alia the master's programme (University 1 2011a:1). Although the latter module is clearly aimed at the academic preparation of students, both prepare practitioners also through certain critical cross-field outcomes (University 1 2011a: 1; University 1 2011b). These outcomes include identifying and solving problems relating to the practice of public administration and management critically and creatively and to effective teamwork (University 1 2011a:1; University 1 2011b:4).

At University 2, the purpose of the honours module HFILPAK (Theory of Science and Public Administration: Methods of Public Administration) (University 2:2010) is to prepare students for research during their master's

studies – studies that are ‘traditionally associated with research’ (University 2 2010:6). However, this module is currently (2011) not compulsory for honours or MPA students, but one of several modules from which a student may choose.

At University 3, it has been shown from a study of the three documents that the aim of the modules is to equip students with the necessary writing and research skills to successfully complete their assignments and theses (University 3 2010c:4). It is also evident from their learning objectives that these modules aim at instilling an awareness of the nature of academic research (University 3 2010a:5), establishing a basic knowledge of different research methodologies, and enabling students to draft their research proposals and to understand the logic and structure of a thesis (University 3 2010a:1; University 3 2010c:5).

From the analysis as reported above, it is clear that the honours and master’s modules in Public Administration research methodology are all primarily aimed at preparing future scholars and researchers for scholarly research. The purposes of these offerings differ substantially from the programme at the Colorado University in Denver as they are not primarily aimed at equipping practitioners to ‘systematically consider alternatives and determine the effectiveness’ of programmes and problems of practice (Fitzpatrick 2000:174). An assessment of the content of these modules will shed light on the extent to which the modules contribute to this preparation.

Content of the methodological preparation provided

The assessment of the content descriptors shows that these modules cover topics such as theory and research, the selection of a research topic, the preparation of a research proposal, the formulation of a problem statement, and an overview of the research process. Furthermore, they provide information relating to the prescribed and recommended work for the students. For the purpose of this article, the assessment of content of research methodology modules is restricted to the presence of quantitative (and specifically for the presence of training in the various statistical techniques), hermeneutical studies of scholarly literature, programme and policy analysis, conceptual studies, secondary data analysis and comparative studies.

Exposure to at least knowledge about quantitative methods seems to be a common denominator to all the modules assessed for the purpose of this research. In both the modules for their honours and master’s students, University 1 makes provision for a study unit on quantitative research (University 1 2011a: Study unit 7; University 1 2011b: Study unit 7). Both study units have the same learning outcome, namely to demonstrate knowledge regarding quantitative data collection instruments. The University 2 honours paper (University 2 2010), which also serves as elective module in the current (2011) MPA programme,

aims to expose students to quantitative research methods in order to 'reflect on the application of the quantitative macro method in Public Administration' and 'to analyse a typical quantitative research method in the context of Public Administration by weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of the method item by item' (University 2 2010:6). The material compiled for the honours students in Public Administration at University 3 (2010a) does not refer to any research methods as it just serves as a guide for a workbook, which was not available for assessment. However, their document aimed at the MPA students (University 3 2010c:4) refers students to the discussion of quantitative data in part 4 of the textbook by Babbie and Mouton (2001). Furthermore, the learning of quantitative research methods and techniques (specifically statistical analysis) is facilitated through various worksheets, exercises and activities (University 3 2010c:10, 15, 48). Although quantitative research methods form part of the research methodology teaching at all three universities, evidence could only be found that one university (University 3) actively facilitated the application of statistical techniques as part of its teaching of quantitative methods.

As is the case with quantitative research methods, the analysis of the relevant documents has shown that all three institutions include the so-called qualitative methods as part of their methodological preparation for honours and master's students. University 1, for example, expects from its honours and master's students to demonstrate knowledge regarding qualitative collection instruments (University 1 2011a:10; 2011b:11). The concept 'qualitative research' seems to include at this institution 'Ethnography and participant observation', 'Interviewing', 'Focus groups' and 'documents as sources of data'. For the purpose of this study, the methods ethnography and participant observation, interviewing, focus groups correspond with the category 'qualitative data collection studying people and their behaviour by means of participant observation, case studies and unstructured interviews'. The references in these study material to documents as sources of data correspond with our category 'Qualitative research using mainly official texts for programme and policy evaluation'. Our category 'Conceptual studies' seems to be included in the study material under the heading 'The literature review' where it is expected from the student to 'demonstrate knowledge regarding the writing of a conceptual framework' (University 1 2011a:10; 2011b:11). No attention is given in the material to teaching methods for the reading of texts (hermeneutic studies) and comparative analysis.

Honours and MPA students at University 2 are exposed to qualitative research methods (referring to data collection methods such as participant observation, interviewing, and focus group discussions) as one of several methodological strategies available to researchers (University 2 2010:6). Students at University 2 are guided to reflect on the way a research problem is formulated for a

qualitative research design, how to plan for the collection of qualitative data and how to interpret qualitative data (University 2 2010:6). Students are also guided to reflect on the various reading modalities including the hermeneutic method (University 2 2010:28). The study material of University 2 exposes students to conceptual studies, secondary data analysis and comparative studies.

The MPA students at University 3 are also guided to look at ‘the analysis of qualitative data: the nature of and principles governing qualitative data analysis, some theoretical approaches and the basic principles of computer aided data analysis’ (University 3 2010c:4). The material contains no reference to hermeneutical studies, programme and policy analysis, qualitative data collection (studying people and their behaviour by means of participant observation, case studies and unstructured interviews), conceptual studies and comparative studies.

Table 2 shows that the tuition emphasis is on quantitative methods as all three top publishing South African Public Administration universities offer tuition in quantitative research methods. However, only University 3 has been shown to give ‘hands-on’ tuition in quantitative data analysis techniques such as statistical analysis. Students of at least two universities are exposed to the methods for the analysis of official documents, the qualitative study of people and secondary data analysis. Students of only one institution are exposed to the hermeneutic methods and conceptual studies while the methods of comparative studies do not receive any attention in the study material of the three universities. As the literature review has shown that the mode of tuition is a key aspect in the

Table 2: Exposure to at least knowledge about research methods by the three South African universities

Methodological preferences higher than the average	University 1	University 2	University 3
Quantitative data collection	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hermeneutical studies using mainly scholarly text	No	Yes	No
Qualitative research using mainly official texts for programme and policy evaluation	Yes	Yes	No
Qualitative data collection studying people and their behaviour by means of participant observation, case studies and unstructured interviews	Yes	Yes	No
Conceptual studies	Yes	No	No
Secondary data analysis	Yes	No	Yes
Comparative studies	No	No	No

success of research methodology teaching, the next section reports on the nature of the methodological preparation offered by the three institutions.

Nature of methodological preparation

The nature or the process of preparing students for research, can follow two main patterns, namely a separate research methodology module (Schultze 2009:997–998) or integrated teaching of research methods through subject-specific content (Fitzpatrick 2000:174; Parker 2010:124–125). The analysis of the material used by the three selected South African universities to teach research methods to Public Administration students, has shown that all three universities offered their teaching through separate Public Administration research methodology modules on the honours and master's level. This observation is noteworthy, as the literature review has shown that the learning of quantitative research methods is enhanced through the integrated teaching of research methodology in combination with the use of well-prepared tuition material, real-life problems and the application of common statistical software (Fitzpatrick 2000:174; Parker 2010:124–125). This section consequently reports on whether such integration (well-prepared tuition material and the solving of real-life problems with research methods and techniques) indeed takes place.

There is evidence that all three institutions use well-prepared tuition material in the teaching of research methods. The material shows clarity with regard to the purpose, objectives or outcomes of the tuition process, assessment criteria and expected involvement or participation of the students. At two universities, i.e. University 1 and University 3, students are encouraged to participate through inter alia group work to 'enhance the practical understanding of the subject', as it is formulated in one of the study guides (University 1 2011a:1).

Bearing in mind that institutions with proven research training success integrate their training of research methods and statistical techniques with the actual doing of research (Aguado 2009:259; Fitzpatrick 2000:180), the verbs or action words (such as **enhance understanding**) in the individual and group assignments facilitated by the selected study material, need some critical reflection. The action words show that the nature of the methodological training provided by University 1 and University 2 are, with the exception of the action words **draft, do assignments, draw up** and **write**, predominantly on the reflective level (e.g. **analyse, explain, define** and **reflect**). The three study guides used by University 3 have shown that they place a relatively stronger emphasis on research-related actions such as read, select, compile, draw up, present, evaluate, submit, suggest and write, than the other institutions.

Although all three institutions offer their teaching of research methodology for Public Administration students in separate modules, the teaching seems

to be in a reflective way rather than in an applied way. Considering that, this research has shown that the purpose of the teaching of research methodology is to prepare future scholars, and as research methods can be considered to be tools of the scholarly trade, one would expect the nature of the methodological teaching to be applied rather than reflective.

CONCLUSION

This article reports on research that was initiated by a proposition that the current poor state of South African Public Administration research is caused by the methodological preparation provided by universities to their students. This proposition had been supported by an earlier analysis of the methodological preferences of the authors of selected peer-reviewed articles, which showed that the selection of research methods by researchers might be influenced by their institutional affiliation. The aim of this article was therefore to report on an assessment of the research methodology preparation provided by three leading publishing Public Administration universities in South Africa, and the way preparation of students can be improved. The units of observation for this assessment were the tuition material used in the research methodology modules at the selected universities. The authors do regard this as a limitation to the study as the inclusion of students and lecturers could have provided a more nuanced interpretation of the material.

Based on the review of scholarly literature, the tuition material used for the research methodology preparation (training) provided by these institutions was assessed according to purpose, content and nature. The assessment showed that the tuition at all three institutions was mainly aimed at the preparation of future scholars and not of public officials as was the case at some institutions abroad. This finding is significant, bearing in mind the conclusion by Cameron and McLaverty (2008:91) that 'Public Administration research is in a parlous state' due to the teaching of Public Administration research methodology at South African universities (Cameron and McLaverty 2008:92), and that publishing scholars are either products of the teaching of these universities, or faculty members at these institutions.

In spite of the finding that the tuition material of all three institutions exposes students to quantitative methods, the authors affiliated to these institutions seem to have a below average preference for applying this methodological category. The methods have shown to be taught but not practiced. This lack of preference has shown to be the highest with authors affiliated to University 3, the institution which is currently providing tuition in the techniques of quantitative data analysis, such as statistical analysis. There seems to be no relation between

the emphasis of these institutions' methodological preparation and the research methods used by the scholars affiliated to them.

The third category of analysis, the nature of methodological preparation, showed that all three institutions use prepared tuition material to offer methodological preparation to their students. Tuition is done in separate modules or papers. This is opposed to the integrated approach followed by some successful institutions abroad. An analysis of the verbs or action words used in their material showed that tuition provided by the University 1 and University 2 is predominantly on the reflective level, where University 3 was seen to place a strong emphasis on research-related actions. However, publishing scholars affiliated to University 3 have shown to have a stronger preference for conceptual approaches than for quantitative or qualitative approaches and related methods and techniques.

This article showed that the research preparation provided to Public Administration scholars by the three selected universities (aimed primarily at scholars as opposed to practitioners), covered mainly the use of quantitative methods, which was offered in separate modules in a mainly reflective way. Furthermore, the article showed that, although the three universities provide tuition in the main social sciences methods, their emphasis in the teaching of these methods is not related to the methodological preference of the authors of peer-reviewed articles. The methodological preparation offered by these institutions thus has seemingly no influence on the methodological preferences of scholars affiliated to them.

An explanation for this lack of influence can most probably be found in the success requirements for methodological training identified by Fitzpatrick (2000), namely that, for greater impact, the teaching of research methods and techniques should be taught integrated with the main content of the programme. The main content of the programme should thus be taught not as the conveying of facts, but as the testing of facts and the solving of problems through the application of content specific methods. This article showed that the tuition at all three South African institutions is given in separate modules or papers (and not integrated into the core content modules of the programmes). Furthermore, it was found that the tuition is provided in a predominantly reflective way, instead of by way of solving real theoretical problems related to practice. Consequently, notwithstanding the existing tuition and training in research methods, Public Administration scholars most probably have at least a broad superficial knowledge about the various methods, but, due to a lack of integrated application in the learning process, do not have the confidence to apply these methods and techniques independently. Due to the apparent absence of applied teaching of research methodology at the three institutions investigated, one can conclude that their tuition of research methodology does

not sufficiently prepare Public Administration scholars to utilise appropriate methods to solve research problems. This conclusion confirms the explanation suggested by Cameron and McLaverty's (2008:92) for the so-called 'parlous state' of South African Public Administration research, namely the teaching of research methodology.

It is suggested that further research be done on ways to integrate methodological preparation at least at honours level, with the solving of central research problems in the core disciplinary content of Public Administration programmes. Such an integrated preparation could enable future scholars to apply theory and appropriate methods and techniques skilfully in order to solve those problems of public administration practice which may not be solved by relying on practice experience and knowledge alone. By doing that, researchers will most probably be more willing to apply the most appropriate method for the research problem at hand confidently, instead of hiding within a paradigmatic comfort zone.

NOTES

1. A scholar in the context of this article refers to Public Administration intellectuals publishing research articles in academic journals. Publishing scholars are thus mainly authors of articles attached to universities.

Attachment 1: Material on which the overview of Public Administration research methodology is based

University	Material
University 1	2011a. <i>Administrative Theory (AET 700)</i> . Material for the honours students. 2011b. <i>Research Methodology (NME 801)</i> Material for master's students
University 2	2010. <i>Theory of Science and Public Administration – methods of Public Administration: a selection. Study guide 2 for the paper HFILPAK</i> . Used for the Honours and MPA programmes.
University 3	2010a. <i>Course framework: Orientation to Public Sector Research Methodology & Academic Writing</i> . Used for the Honours programme. 2010b. <i>Course Framework: Research report module</i> . Used for the Honours programme. Used for the Honours programme. 2010c. <i>Applied Public Sector Research Methodology & Academic Writing 2010</i> . Material used for the MPA programme.

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