Analyzing a published piece of research

Overall

* What is the target audience?
* What is the approach taken by the researchers?
* Is it qualitative, quantitative or mixed?
* What are the assumptions made by the researchers?
* How prestigious is the publication in which the article/chapter appears?
* Is it peer reviewed?
* How old is the publication?
* How seminal is the article/chapter?
* Who are the researchers and what are their qualifications?

Abstract

* Is the abstract present and clear?
* Does it accurately reflect the publication?
* Does the abstract give you all of the important information needed to make an initial judgment as to the study’s findings?

Introduction

* Does the introduction provide enough background so that you can understand the context of the study?
* Are the purpose and research questions pertaining to the study clearly and explicitly stated?
* Is the context linked clearly to the purpose of the study?
* Is the subject position of the researchers made explicit?
* Is the organization of the rest of the paper laid out clearly?
* In experimental design, has an explicit reference been made to a hypothesis?

Literature review

* Do the researchers provide a balance between a broad overview of the literature and a focused examination of those publications most pertinent to the study in question?
* Are these publications seminal?
* Is there a good mixture of academic and professional sources?
* Is there a good mixture of older and more recent sources?
* Are all views on the topic represented?
* Is the literature review presented thematically?
* Does the argument in the literature review support the goals of the study in question?
* Does the review identify gaps in the literature that point to the need for the study in question?

Conceptual/theoretical framework

* Are the theories and concepts that frame the study clearly stated?
* Are they appropriate for the study?
* Do they inform all aspects of the study, including the purpose of the methodology, description of the findings and analysis?

Methodology

* Is the rationale for methodological procedure explained?
* Is the research site described?
* Is demographic information about the participants provided?
* Is the sample size robust?
* Is the methodological procedure clearly stated?
* Is information about the instruments provided?
* Is there a variety of data collection instruments and procedures?
* Are samples of this instrumentation provided?
* Does it have enough demographic information about the participants?
* Are claims made about the representativeness or typicality of the sample?
* Are claims made about trustworthiness or rigor (qualitative)?
* Are claims made about reliability and validity (quantitative)?
* Are there claims made about triangulation?
* Are the above claims substantiated?
* Was ethics clearance obtained?
* Was ethical considerations observed and maintained?
* In experimental designs, were there any apparatus used? Was there a control group? Experimental group? Were the conditions and variables fully described?
* Are the limitations of the study discussed?

Results and Findings

* Is the analytic procedure made clear?
* How rigorous was the analytic procedure?
* Are the findings presented in such a way as to allow the reader to draw their own conclusions?
* Are sufficient data presented by way of statistics (raw data) or quotations from interviews?
* Is it clear how the findings support the conclusions?
* Has a full range of data been presented and NOT just that which supports the conclusions of the study?

Discussion/conclusion

* Are the findings examined in view of the original research question, purpose of the study and conceptual/theoretical framework?
* Is there a clear statement of support or otherwise in terms of the original hypothesis or research question?
* Is there a discussion of the implications of the study in terms of concrete educational practice, programming or policy?
* Is there a discussion of the implications of the study in terms of education theory, the academic literature or the need for future studies?

Conclusion

* Is a summary of the study and the main findings presented?
* Did the study provide any new insights or information?
* Are there references made to the points made in the introduction?

General writing

* Is the reference list complete?
* Is the APA (or alternative style) correct?
* Do any tables and graphs make things clearer?
* Do any appendices or footnotes make things clearer?
* Is the writing free of jargon?
* Is there much repetition?
* Is the tone of the writing accessible?
* Are there any grammatical errors?