The Application of Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods in Public Policy Analysis Literature and Its Implications for Public Policy Analysis Teaching

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[**Abstract**] Public policy analysis is a core course in public administration programmes at colleges and universities. Its teaching content has long been caught between the proliferation of research methods and the limited class hours available, and decisions about what to include rest largely on textbook convention and the personal preference of instructors. This study takes as its object 127 records retrieved from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) using the keyword "public policy analysis", restricted to the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) source category and to publication dates between 2020 and September 2026, and codes them one by one to document the pattern of qualitative and quantitative method use. The results show 58 non-empirical studies (46.0%), 33 qualitative empirical studies (26.2%), 31 quantitative empirical studies (24.6%) and 4 studies of mixed orientation (3.2%). Within the 68 empirical studies, qualitative research accounts for 48.5% and quantitative research for 45.6%; the difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.901$). Among qualitative methods, case study accounts for 54.5% and fieldwork does not appear at all; and among quantitative methods, statistical and econometric modelling (41.9%) and the quantitative analysis of policy documents (25.8%) rank first. Methods given prominence in textbooks—cost-benefit analysis, data envelopment analysis, input-output analysis and system dynamics—do not appear, and stakeholder analysis appears in only 2 articles. It is therefore argued that teaching priority cannot be determined by frequency of use alone; teaching content should be arranged hierarchically on three grounds jointly: observed frequency, transferability of the method, and theoretical necessity.

[**Key words**] public policy analysis; qualitative methods; quantitative methods; course teaching; teaching priority

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[**DOI**] https://doi.org/10.62662/kxwxy0309004

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1 Introduction

Public policy analysis is a core course for public administration majors at colleges and universities. Its methodological system spans two broad families: the qualitative family comprises case study, process tracing, grounded theory and the like; the quantitative family comprises statistical and econometric modelling, the quantitative analysis of policy documents and the like. Set against the continued expansion of research methods is the constraint on class hours: a course of 32 to 48 class hours cannot distribute teaching resources evenly across dozens of methods, yet the current selection of method content rests largely on textbook arrangement and the personal preference of instructors. The frequency with which a method is used reflects the actual pattern of application; curriculum design must also respond to what is normatively required.

Existing research provides a basis for the present study. He Yanling's count of 2,729 articles shows that empirical studies accounted for only 4.5%; Fan Bonai and Lou Xiaojing's count of 858 articles shows that the

share of empirical studies had risen to 54.3%, of which qualitative research accounted for 88.3%; and Li Xin and Li Qiwen provide frequency distributions of method use for recent years. These studies trace the "empiricisation and quantification" of public policy analysis research, but they remain inadequate as a basis for deciding what methods a course should cover: their samples mostly ended in 2022, and their sampling frames mostly cover public administration as a whole; their purpose stops at describing the pattern, without extending to the selection of course content, and without asking whether intermediate grounds are needed in moving from "frequency of use" to "teaching priority".

This paper takes "public policy analysis" as its subject term, codes the relevant CSSCI literature published since 2020 article by article, reports the three-level distribution of qualitative method families, quantitative method families and policy analysis perspectives, and discusses the conditions under which "frequency of use" can be converted into "teaching priority". Three qualifications should be stated at the outset. The sample comes from a keyword search rather than from discipline-wide sampling. Coding draws mainly on abstracts and therefore systematically underestimates the frequency of method use. The teaching recommendations offered here are empirical reference opinions.

2 Statistics on the application of qualitative and quantitative research methods in public policy analysis

2.1 Data sources, coding framework, and reliability and validity

The data were retrieved from CNKI on 9 September 2026. The search conditions were keyword = "public policy analysis", source category = CSSCI, and publication date = 2020—2026. The search returned 127 records; after excluding one item of translation-series publication information, 126 articles remained as the valid sample.

Three points should be made about the boundaries of the sample. The retrieved records are scattered across some 80 journals (*Chinese Public Administration* for 9 articles, *Public Administration and Policy Review* for 7, *Journal of Public Management* for 6, and the remaining journals mostly 1 to 4 each), and the sample includes literature from information science, education, economics and other disciplines outside public administration. A keyword search misses articles that do not carry the keyword, so the sample is a collection of literature bearing a particular label rather than the whole of the public policy analysis field. The records contain no explicit publication-year field, so annual distributions and diachronic trends cannot be reported.

Coding proceeded at two levels. The first level is the classification of research orientation. Qualitative empirical research refers to research that has explicit empirical material, relies mainly on interpretation and induction, and does not conduct statistical inference. Quantitative empirical research refers to research that conducts systematic quantifying operations, including coding and counting, statistical and econometric modelling, the calculation of network indicators, or text computing. Mixed orientation refers to research that combines case study with set-theoretic operations, represented by qualitative comparative analysis; it is listed as a separate category. Non-empirical research is that which involves no empirical material. The second level is the method family. Qualitative methods fall into six categories: case study; historical-diachronic analysis and process tracing; qualitative analysis of policy texts and discourse; grounded theory; normative policy analysis; and theory-driven qualitative policy analysis. Quantitative methods fall into nine categories: quantitative analysis of policy documents; statistical and econometric modelling; questionnaire survey and scales; text mining and machine learning; social network analysis and citation or bibliometric analysis; experimental and quasi-experimental designs; meta-analysis; simulation modelling; and analysis of big data and secondary administrative records.

The unit of coding is the article; where a single article uses two research methods, each is counted separately. Method identification relies mainly on the abstract, with reference to the title and the journal in which the article appears; where the abstract does not state the method explicitly, it is inferred from the research design. On reliability, coding was completed by a single coder, and no agreement rate or kappa coefficient is reported; this is an acknowledged gap. On validity, Chinese abstracts generally do not state the names of the methods used, and articles that can be clearly identified account for roughly 80% of the total. The study therefore reports Wilson 95%

confidence intervals and refrains from interpreting the precise ranking of methods whose frequencies are close.

2.2 Overall distribution of research orientations

Within the 68 empirical studies, there are 33 qualitative studies (48.5%), 31 quantitative studies (45.6%) and 4 studies of mixed orientation (5.9%) (see Table 1). An exact binomial test on the difference in the number of qualitative and quantitative studies gives a two-sided $p = 0.901$: the difference is not statistically significant. This paper therefore does not support the conclusion that qualitative methods are used more than quantitative ones—within the precision afforded by this sample, the two are broadly comparable in scale. This result differs substantially from the 88.3% qualitative and 11.7% quantitative reported by Fan and Lou (2013). Because the two studies differ in search strategy, journal coverage and period, no direct inference can be drawn; the comparison can only suggest that the relative share of quantitative methods has most likely risen markedly over the past decade or so. The implication for teaching is straightforward: qualitative and quantitative training should no longer be ranked as primary and secondary, but should stand side by side as core basic skills for researchers in this field.

Table 1. The distribution of research orientations across the 126 articles

Research orientation	Articles	Share (%)	95% CI (%)	Coding criterion
Non-empirical	58	46.0	37.6-54.7	No empirical material
Qualitative empirical	33	26.2	19.3-34.5	Empirical material; interpretation or induction dominant
Quantitative empirical	31	24.6	17.9-32.8	Empirical material; systematic quantification
Mixed orientation (QCA)	4	3.2	1.2-7.9	Case study + set-theoretic operations
Total	126	100.0	—	One publication notice excluded

Note: Confidence intervals are Wilson 95% intervals.

2.3 Application of qualitative research methods

Case study accounts for 54.5%, the only qualitative method to exceed half (see Table 2). This result fits the conditions of domestic policy research: the micro-mechanisms of the policy process are difficult to observe with large-sample data, while process tracing of typical cases can supply mechanistic explanation and places comparatively flexible demands on data. Next comes historical-diachronic analysis and process tracing (5 articles), which likewise points to a research strategy of "trading the time dimension for causal identification".

In contrast, only 1 article uses grounded theory, and fieldwork and in-depth interviews in the strict sense do not appear. The absence of the latter is attributable in part to the underestimation caused by abstracts that do not state the method, but it still points to a fact that deserves attention in teaching: the tradition of qualitative fieldwork in this field is not mature, qualitative training is heavily concentrated on the single path of case study, and the qualitative toolkit that learners acquire is correspondingly narrow. Once they encounter a problem unsuited to case study—one requiring cross-regional comparison, for example, or the identification of overall distributional features—they often have no way to proceed.

Table 2. Frequency of use of qualitative research methods

Method family	Articles	% of qualitative sample	% of full sample	Typical forms
Case study	18	54.5	14.3	Single-case thick description, multi-case comparison, typology construction
Historical-diachronic analysis and process tracing	5	15.2	4.0	Tracing policy change over long periods, mechanism process tracing

Continued Table 2

Method family	Articles	% of qualitative sample	% of full sample	Typical forms
Qualitative analysis of policy texts and discourse	4	12.1	3.2	Interpretation of policy texts, discourse and narrative analysis
Normative policy analysis	4	12.1	3.2	Value analysis, feasibility analysis, comparative policy analysis
Theory-driven qualitative policy analysis	2	6.1	1.6	Application of existing theoretical frameworks to specific policies
Grounded theory	1	3.0	0.8	Inducing theoretical models from empirical material
(Total method codes)	34	—	—	One article counted in two categories

Note: n = 33; multiple counting.

2.4 Application of quantitative research methods

The application of quantitative methods shows a structure of "one dominant method and many weak ones". Statistical and econometric modelling is used in 13 articles, ranking first and accounting for 41.9% of the quantitative sample; among these, causal identification designs such as event history analysis, propensity score matching with difference-in-differences, and instrumental variables account for 4 articles in total (see Table 3). Experimental and quasi-experimental designs appear in 2 articles and meta-analysis appears in 2 articles. Awareness of causal inference has thus entered policy research, but the absolute volume of application remains limited, and most studies still remain at the level of correlation analysis.

A growth point with distinctly local characteristics is the quantitative analysis of policy documents: 8 articles take policy texts as their data and characterise policy instrument structures, policy effectiveness and policy synergy through coding, classification and frequency counting. Its teaching value is particularly high: the data are publicly available, the demands on mathematical preparation are modest, the core operations are coding and counting, and it is highly reproducible—for learners with a weak statistical foundation, it is a more realistic entry point into quantitative research than regression analysis. In addition, text mining (5 articles) together with social network analysis and citation or bibliometric analysis (4 articles) account for 9 articles; such work comes mainly from journals with a background in information science, indicating that the field of policy informatics is gradually taking shape. Simulation modelling (1 article) and experimental design (2 articles) remain at the stage of sporadic exploration.

Table 3. Frequency of use of quantitative research methods

Method family	Articles	% of quantitative sample	% of full sample	Typical forms
Statistical and econometric modelling	13	41.9	10.3	Regression, panel data, event history analysis, PSM-DID, instrumental variables
Quantitative analysis of policy documents	8	25.8	6.3	Policy text coding and frequency counting; two-dimensional policy instrument framework
Questionnaire survey and scales	5	16.1	4.0	Measurement of satisfaction, policy compliance and public attitudes
Text mining and machine learning	5	16.1	4.0	LDA topic modelling, word vectors, sentiment analysis

Continued Table 3

Method family	Articles	% of quantitative sample	% of full sample	Typical forms
Social network analysis and citation or bibliometric analysis	4	12.9	3.2	Intergovernmental cooperation networks, co-occurrence networks, knowledge mapping
Big data and secondary administrative records	3	9.7	2.4	Medical insurance claims records, clinical records
Experimental and quasi-experimental designs	2	6.5	1.6	Online controlled experiments, quasi-natural experiments
Meta-analysis	2	6.5	1.6	Re-synthesis of existing experimental or survey studies
Simulation modelling	1	3.2	0.8	Agent-based modelling, large language model agent simulation
(Total method codes)	43	—	—	Some articles counted in two categories

Note: n = 31; multiple counting.

2.5 Methodological forms of non-empirical research and their implications for teaching

Of the 18 reviews and survey articles, 6 are dedicated methodological introductions, covering respectively intermediary network analysis, text analysis, causal process tracing, multi-agent simulation, Q methodology and game theory (see Table 4). This indicates that these methods are still at the stage of diffusion and application. Their place in teaching is therefore closer to "broadening academic horizons" than to "competence required at the present stage", and the pragmatic treatment is to place them in an introductory course of the "methods map" type rather than to allocate dedicated hands-on class hours.

Theory-construction methods account for 51.7%, which shows that "proposing an analytical framework" is itself an important mode of knowledge production in this field. This gives rise to a confusion that easily arises in teaching: students commonly mistake a "theoretical framework" for an "analytical method", and believe that citing a theoretical model completes the analysis. The two must be clearly distinguished. A theoretical framework supplies a perspective for observation and a conceptual vocabulary; and an analytical method supplies the operating procedures of research and the rules for admitting evidence. Teaching frameworks without methods produce empty discourse attached to a framework; and teaching methods without frameworks produce a pile of techniques detached from the central question.

Table 4. Frequency of non-empirical studies

Form	Articles	Share (%)	Notes
Theory construction and concept or framework analysis	30	51.7	Proposing analytical frameworks, typologies and conceptual elaboration
Literature review, disciplinary history and methodological review	18	31.0	Including 6 dedicated methodological introductions and reviews
Normative research and policy recommendation	6	10.3	Value argumentation, policy interpretation and recommendations
Teaching research and research on the discipline or textbooks	3	5.2	Directly concerned with policy analysis courses and textbooks
Other (book review)	1	1.7	—
Total	58	100.0	—

2.6 Application of policy analysis perspectives and analytical methods

The statistics presented above answer the question "what methods does this field use". Existing courses, however, also devote substantial time to policy process theories and policy analysis instruments. This study therefore additionally coded the sample by analytical perspective; the results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Policy analysis perspective and distribution of analysis tools

Analytical perspective or instrument	Articles	% of full sample
Policy implementation perspective (implementation deviation, implementation networks, political momentum, pilot implementation, etc.)	13	10.3
Policy process theories (multiple streams, punctuated equilibrium, policy feedback, policy networks, etc.)	11	8.7
Policy instrument perspective (supply-, environment- and demand-side classifications)	9	7.1
Policy informatics and policy text computing	9	7.1
Behavioural public policy and nudging	5	4.0
Policy evaluation and performance measurement	5	4.0
Causal inference designs (DID, instrumental variables, experiments, meta-analysis)	5	4.0
Evidence-based decision making	4	3.2
Value-normative analysis (fact, value, norm, feasibility)	4	3.2
Policy diffusion and innovation diffusion	3	2.4
Institutional analysis (new, historical and network institutionalism)	3	2.4
Game theory	2	1.6
Stakeholder analysis (with stakeholders as the unit of analysis)	2	1.6
Cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness analysis (with actual calculation completed)	0	0.0
Data envelopment analysis, input-output analysis, system dynamics, Delphi method	0	0.0

Note: N = 126; multiple counting.

The most striking finding appears at the bottom of the table: cost-benefit analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis, data envelopment analysis, input-output analysis, system dynamics and the Delphi method all have a frequency of zero; stakeholder analysis appears twice; the advocacy coalition framework has a frequency of zero, the multiple streams framework appears twice and punctuated equilibrium theory once. Within the policy process theories, the distribution is: policy network and network analysis 4 times, policy feedback 3 times, multiple streams 2 times, punctuated equilibrium once, and actor-network theory once.

These items of low or zero frequency are precisely the ones that occupy a great deal of space in existing textbooks. Cost-benefit analysis is assigned complete chapters on discounting and sensitivity analysis; stakeholder analysis is assigned matrices and influence-interest grids; data envelopment analysis and input-output analysis often occupy the main part of the chapter on "quantitative methods of policy evaluation". A frequency of zero does not mean the method is never used: cost-benefit analysis appears more often in economics-oriented policy evaluation journals, and stakeholder analysis is often applied in the body of a study without being reflected in the abstract. The marked contrast nevertheless deserves attention, because the question it raises is not "whether anyone uses these methods" but "whether classroom teaching allocates a large number of class hours to tools that students will rarely use in future".

The upper part of the table is equally instructive for teaching. The policy implementation perspective ranks

first with 13 occurrences, reflecting a shift in the field's centre of gravity from "how policy is made" to "how policy is implemented". The policy instrument perspective and policy informatics appear 9 times each, representing two comparatively mature indigenous research paths. If a course is organised around the main line of "policy implementation—policy instruments—policy text computing", it will both accord with the actual state of the literature and fit the practical needs of Chinese policy practice.

3 Focus of public policy analysis teaching and related recommendations

3.1 Frequency of use cannot by itself determine teaching priority

The central judgment of this paper is that frequency of use is an important basis for deciding what to teach, but cannot by itself determine teaching priority. First, frequency reflects practice that has already been completed, whereas teaching must address the practice that students will conduct in the future. The dominant share of case study is partly the joint product of data availability and journal publication conventions, and does not necessarily mean that it should occupy the highest teaching priority. Second, a high frequency of use does not mean that students have not already mastered the content. Descriptive statistics and basic regression appear frequently in the literature, but most students have encountered them in prerequisite courses, so the marginal return to teaching them again may be lower than using a method such as the quantitative analysis of policy documents, which is less frequent but for which students have no foundation and which is easy to begin with. Third, a low frequency of use does not mean that the content should not be taught. Policy process theories appear in only 11 articles in total (8.7%), yet they provide the conceptual framework for understanding how policies form, change and terminate; to classify them simply as material to be "taught little or not at all" would leave students with operating procedures but without any understanding of how the policy process works.

This paper therefore adopts three grounds for judgment. Observed frequency determines the intensity of class-hour investment. Transferability of the method—whether students can independently reproduce the research process once the course ends—determines the form of teaching: whether to teach principles, to teach operation, or to teach only how to read the method. Theoretical necessity determines whether the content needs to be taught at all, rather than how much space it should be given. Of the three, frequency is the easiest to measure and the most easily misused, while the other two are difficult to quantify, yet they determine what teaching actually achieves.

3.2 Hierarchical design of course content

On the basis of these three grounds, the method content of the course is arranged hierarchically as shown in Table 6. Class hours are calculated against a total of 48, of which about 20 are devoted to method training, with the remainder used for policy process theories, the policy analysis process and comprehensive exercises.

Table 6. Layered recommendations for the method content of public policy analysis course

Level	Method	Observed articles	Grounds for grading	Suggested class hours
Level 1: core mastery	Case study design (single, multiple, comparative)	18	The absolute mainstay of qualitative empirical work; strong mechanistic explanation	3-4
Level 1: core mastery	Quantitative analysis of policy documents (policy text coding and frequency counting)	8	Accessible to beginners, reproducible, well-suited to MPA theses	3
Level 1: core mastery	Reading the results of statistical and econometric analysis (regression, panel data, DID)	13	The largest quantitative category; the aim is to read rather than to run models	3-4
Level 1: core mastery	General process of policy analysis (problem definition—objectives—options—evaluation)	—	The skeleton running through all types of research rather than a single method	2

Continued Table 6

Level	Method	Observed articles	Grounds for grading	Suggested class hours
Level 2: should be understood	Historical-diachronic analysis and process tracing	5	A common route to understanding policy change in China	2
Level 2: should be understood	Questionnaire survey and scales	5	A standard instrument for research on satisfaction and compliance	2
Level 2: should be understood	Text mining and sentiment analysis	5	Growing rapidly; taught mainly by demonstration, independent implementation not required	1-2
Level 2: should be understood	Social network analysis and bibliometrics	4	Applicable to intergovernmental relations and policy diffusion	1-2
Level 3: awareness sufficient	Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA)	4	A valuable configurational perspective, but costly to learn	1
Level 3: awareness sufficient	Experimental and quasi-experimental designs	2	The reference standard for causal identification, still little used	1
Level 3: awareness sufficient	Meta-analysis	2	Usable in review-type degree theses	0.5
Level 3: awareness sufficient	Simulation modelling (agent-based or multi-agent)	1	A frontier direction, not to be developed at this stage	0.5
To be reclassified	Policy process theories (multiple streams, punctuated equilibrium, policy feedback, policy networks)	11	Low frequency, but with the theoretical skeleton and a regular examination topic; should move from the "methods" to the "theory" block, or be compressed into a 2-hour theoretical map	2
To be compressed substantially	Cost-benefit analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis, stakeholder analysis, DEA, input-output analysis, system dynamics	0-2	Large in textbooks but almost absent from the literature; teach only the decision logic and conditions of application, not computational detail	⩽ 2 in total

Note: Given for a course of 48 class hours.

Two aspects of Table 6 depart from what a direct ranking by frequency would produce. The first is the reclassification of the policy process theories. On frequency alone, the multiple streams framework (2 articles), punctuated equilibrium theory (1 article) and the advocacy coalition framework (0 article) should all be classed as material to be "taught little or not at all". This paper considers classification to be inappropriate. The three perform the function of a theoretical framework rather than that of a mere technical instrument. They are the conceptual foundation that cannot be avoided in reading any policy literature, and they are regular examination content for those proceeding to further study. Existing bibliometric research on the multiple streams framework in China likewise shows that the theory is applied widely but with a highly uniform methodology, which indicates that the real issue is not whether to teach it but how deeply. A reasonable adjustment is to move it from the methods module into the theory module, allocate 2 class hours to laying out the complete conceptual framework, and use the hours thus saved for hands-on training. The second is the adjustment of the classical policy analysis instruments. Methods such as cost-benefit analysis and stakeholder analysis are barely used in the sample and, by the logic of frequency, should be deleted; this paper recommends only that they be compressed. Scarcity of use in the sample does not mean that such instruments are unimportant; it may equally reflect a research tradition in which domestic policy

argumentation has long leaned towards qualitative analysis and lacks quantitative cost argumentation. That tension is its own excellent classroom material: one class hour spent on discussing "why Chinese policy analysis literature rarely conducts cost-benefit analysis" both covers the core knowledge point and trains learners' capacity for reflection.

3.3 Supporting adjustments to teaching objectives, training methods and assessment

Adjusting the layering of content is not by itself sufficient. Unless teaching objectives, training methods and assessment are adjusted in step, a layered design easily drifts from its purpose—for example, by reducing the teaching of case study to "reading through cases", and the teaching of quantitative policy document analysis to "interpreting tables".

First, the teaching objective should shift from "mastering methods" to "being able to select methods, to read methods, and to present them properly". To "select" means that, given a concrete policy problem, the student can judge whether case study or quantitative policy document analysis should be used and can state the grounds for that judgment clearly. To "read" means that, faced with an existing evaluation report, the student can judge whether the data source is reliable, whether the identification strategy holds, and can interpret the results tables correctly. To "present properly" means that, when writing up research, the student can state the data source, the coding rules and the reliability and validity information clearly in the methods section.

Second, training should use real and reproducible materials in place of abstract theoretical exposition. The 126 records compiled for this study, together with their coding sheet, can themselves be turned into teaching material, and require no programming on the part of learners. The exercises fall into three gradations: given 20 policy texts, complete coding and counting according to the "supply-environment-demand" framework (Excel suffices); select a local policy case, trace the chain of events and extract the core mechanism; and, given a quantitative research article, ask learners to identify its identification strategy and explain how its results tables should be read.

Third, concept-recall assessment should be replaced by assessment through a "method application proposal". Given a policy problem, learners are asked to state the research method they intend to use, the data required and its availability, the analytical steps and expected outputs, and the threats to validity together with how they would be addressed. This form of assessment does not require learners to carry out a complete analysis, but it does test whether they understand the match between a research method and a research question. By contrast, asking how many streams the multiple streams framework comprises tests nothing but memory.

3.4 Flexible adjustment by level of training

The layering set out above represents the general case; in practice it needs to be adjusted according to the level of training. For professional degree students such as those on MPA programmes, the quantitative analysis of policy documents and case study design should be strengthened, and the teaching of statistical and econometric content should centre on reading evaluation reports. MPA degree theses take the form mainly of special-topic research, case analysis reports, investigation reports and policy analysis, for which those two types of content are the best match; moreover, MPA students are mostly in employment and their time for training is fragmented. For academic master's students, the teaching of the principles of statistics and econometrics, qualitative comparative analysis and causal inference design should be developed further. Academic degree theses usually impose requirements of methodological rigour that cannot be met by reading alone. For undergraduates, teaching should focus on the general process of policy analysis and on an introduction to case study; the quantitative analysis of policy documents can be set as one complete assignment, taking students through the full process of collecting texts, devising a coding sheet, coding, counting and interpreting, and classroom organisation can draw on problem-driven teaching methods such as the "policy investigation" exercise.

4 Conclusion

Taking 126 CSSCI articles as its sample, this paper documents the pattern of qualitative and quantitative methods used in the field of public policy analysis and, on that basis, discusses where the teaching of the public policy analysis course should place its emphasis. Three main conclusions follow. First, the shares of qualitative and quantitative research are broadly balanced. Within the empirical studies, qualitative research accounts for 48.5%

and quantitative research for 45.6%, and the difference is not statistically significant; courses should no longer be arranged on the presumption that qualitative work is primary and quantitative secondary, or the reverse. Non-empirical research accounts for 46.0%, which indicates that course content cannot be confined to technical methods. Second, the use of methods shows a pattern in which concentration coexists with blank areas. Qualitative research is heavily concentrated in case study, which accounts for 54.5%, while fieldwork is not used at all. Quantitative research is dominated by statistical and econometric modelling (41.9%) and the quantitative analysis of policy documents (25.8%), while experimental and simulation methods remain scattered in the existing research. Cost-benefit analysis, data envelopment analysis, input-output analysis, system dynamics and the Delphi method, all listed as core methods in textbooks, do not appear at all, and stakeholder analysis is used in only 2 articles. The knowledge system presented in textbooks differs substantially from the actual distribution in the existing literature; this is the finding of the present study that most deserves the attention of those concerned with teaching in public administration. Third, deriving teaching priority from frequency of use requires an intermediate step of judgment. Frequency of use reflects only the actual state of method use, whereas curriculum design must also respond to what ought to be selected. It is therefore proposed that the priority of teaching content be determined jointly by three grounds: observed frequency of use, transferability of the method, and theoretical necessity.

This study has two limitations. First, the sample was obtained through a keyword search rather than through stratified sampling of the discipline, so its representativeness is inadequate. Second, reliance on abstracts as the main basis for coding systematically underestimates the actual use of methods; future research could adopt the approach of coding abstracts combined with verification against full texts. In addition, the two grounds of transferability and theoretical necessity still lack independent measurement; a more rigorous approach would be to cross-check them against surveys of student needs, feedback from employers, or the results of course evaluation.

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