

Master I (LS)

Methodology in Social Sciences

The Quality of Data

(Part I)

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The Quality of Data

- The quality of data refers to the value of the collected information which determines the relevance and accuracy of the research results. It is based on several criteria including validity and reliability.

Data Quality Issues

- The quality of data may be influenced by a set of issues such as the irrelevance and unreliability of the gathered information which may be caused by various factors. It also depends on the researcher's skills and his/her way of interpreting the collected data.

Factors Affecting the Quality of the Collected Data

- The quality of the collected data and the research results may be affected by certain factors such as the informants' attitudes towards the investigation taking place and the nature of the employed tools.

The informants' Attitudes

- The attitudes of the respondents towards the study and their way of collaborating with the researcher can affect the results of the investigation. The informants' attitudes can take different forms. Brown (1988) claims that such attitudes may create the Hawthorne effect and the Halo effect.

The informants' Attitudes

- The Hawthorne effect means that some people may have a feeling of superiority because of being chosen to be involved in a study so that they will perform well due to such a feeling.

The informants' Attitudes

- The Halo effect refers to the fact that sometimes the informants may respond positively and provide positive replies since they like the subject or the person they are questioned about. The people involved in the study may also give unreliable answers because they just want to please the researcher and help him/her in his/her research.

Issues of Measurement

- Problems of measurement may arise when using questionnaires, interviews, tests and observation as tools of gathering data because these instruments rely on human behaviour and people's opinions which are not stable. Brown (1988) lists three types of problems related to the measurement process. They are: the practice effect, the reactivity effect and the instability of the results.

Issues of Measurement

- The practice effect is linked to the results obtained when employing the same tools repeatedly. This means that the informants will provide different answers to the questions of the interview or questionnaire when administered for a second time.
- If a test is administered to a group of students twice and the level of these learners increased, the improvement of these results would underline the practice effect which is related to the possibility that the learners' progress is due to the fact that they remembered the questions and learnt from the mistakes they previously made in such a test.

Issues of Measurement

- The reactivity effect refers to the reaction of the respondents towards a research tool such as a questionnaire or an interview since they may provide opinions and answers that do not really reflect their previous attitudes and their actual behaviour.
- It implies that the employed measures create a change in the attitudes of the informants concerning the studied subject so that they will adopt the ideas presented in a questionnaire or an interview and consider them as principles.

Issues of Measurement

- The instability of the research results means that the researcher employs the same tool of investigation more than once but he/she may get different findings.
- For instance, the same test may be utilized repeatedly to measure the performance of a certain group of learners but the results may not be stable and may be different from those of the first test.
- The same thing can be said concerning the administration of a questionnaire to the same group of people twice and obtaining different answers from each respondent.

References

- Brown, James Dean. (1988). *Understanding Research in Second Language Learning*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Cohen, Louis, Manion, Lawrence, and Morrison, Keith. (2007). *Research Methods in Education*. New York: Routledge