INVESTIGATING SOCIAL ISSUES

MODULE 3

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Research is the systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observations that may lead to the development of generalizations, principles or themes, resulting in prediction and, possibly, ultimate control of events.

- (Kahn 1986)

WHY CONDUCT RESEARCH?

- To generate new knowledge
- To solve a problem
- To be able to predict an outcome
- To test a theory

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESEARCH

- Directed towards a solution of a problem.
- Emphasizes the development of generalization for future use.
- Based upon observable or empirical evidence.
- Involves gathering new data.
- Is rigorous and systematic.
- Is carefully recorded and reported

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

To investigate an issue or problem that affects social life but is not well understood. It is the process of enquiry and discovery.

- It originates with a question or problem identification
- It requires formation of a goal-oriented statement
- It divides the main problem into sub-problems
- It follows specific research procedures in the collection and interpretation of all relevant data
- Research is either cyclical of helical(spiral)

TYPES OF RESEARCH

All research projects fall into a combination of the following types:

- Historical – describes the past
- Descriptive – explores relationships between variables
- Experimental – maps trends in variables when they are controlled and manipulated

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE STUDIES

All research uses either one of these two main approaches of describing the observation of situations and phenomena.

- **Qualitative Studies**: focuses on description of observation. Data is generally unstructured and consists of words, pictures and sounds, e.g., *Historical research*
- **Quantitative Studies**: involves the use of numerical methods of describing observations. Facts can be analysed using statistical techniques, e.g., *Surveys.* Most students will use this approach.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

These are important concepts in conducting research.

- Validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure *actually* measures the concept which it purports to measure.
- Reliability refers to whether a particular technique yields the same results repeatedly when applied to a research question.

PROBLEM STATEMENTS AND HYPOTHESES

- A problem statement or a research or thesis statement is a sentence in which you clearly state what you wish to find out. It can also take the form of a question, e.g., *To what extent does pollution affect he daily lives of the villagers of Couva?*

It proposes that there may be a relationship between two variables

HYPOTHESIS

This is a statement which posits an answer to your problem, e.g., *The increased incidences of pollution have caused a rise in respiratory diseases in the residents of Couva*.

It is a prediction about the relationship between two variables in a research study.

SUB-QUESTIONS; SUB-PROBLEMS;

Also termed *research questions*, these narrow the focus and guides the study naturally from the problem statement .They directly influence data collection.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This is a concise description of the nature of the problem under investigation. It gives focus as well as context to the issue in addition to highlighting the variables and the relationship between them.

DELIMITATIONS

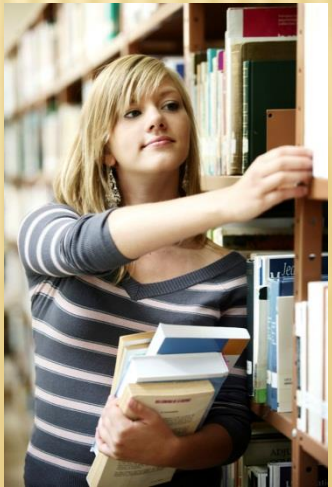
States the parameters or boundaries of your research. In other words it limits the scope of the enquiry as determined by the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions that were made through the development of the proposal

DEFINITION OF KEY TECHNICAL TERMS

Not necessarily a dictionary meaning but how the words are used in the context of the study

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This is a critique of the literature relevant to a particular topic. It gives an overview of what has been said, who the writers are, what are the prevailing theories and what methodologies were used. There should be a clear link between the aims of your research and your literature review.

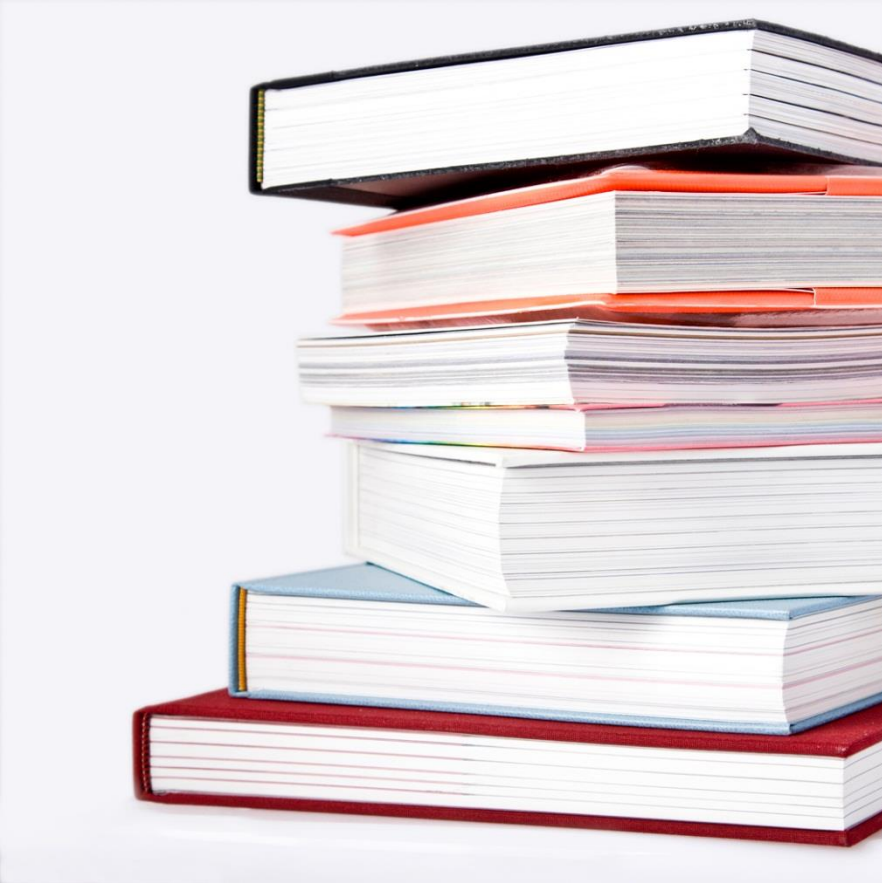


PURPOSE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

- To relate previous studies to your problem
- To guide / fine tune the focus your research
- To ensure that no duplication of work occurs
- To provide clues as to where future research can go
- To identify gaps, inconsistencies and contradictions in the literature

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Books
- Text
- Internet
- Newspapers
- Government documents
- Archives
- Oral histories



EVALUATING WHAT YOU READ

- Expertise – is the author reputable, e.g. associated with a university?
- Relevance – is the topic very similar to your own even if it is non-Caribbean?
- Reliability – are the descriptions of methods and results clear and unbiased?

DATA COLLECTION SOURCES

- Primary sources - these may come from interviews, surveys and observations and are essentially classified as information generated by the researcher himself.
- Secondary sources – these include books, encyclopaedias, journals and newspapers. Note *data* is raw information whereas *literature* is the material written by experts which your study will support or contradict.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This is the general plan of your research. The two main types of design are Pure Research which tests theory and Applied Research which answers a specific problem.

Most Caribbean Studies students will conduct Applied Research on a particular problem in their school or community.

THE DESIGN INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING

- Research methods – strategy used e.g. interviews, observation, archival research
- Instrument - questionnaires, check lists, field notes
- Sample – a subset of the population
- Form of the results – tables, graphs, text photographs, maps

PRETESTING/PILOTING

This phase checks the instrument for adequacy and accuracy.

- Checks on flow and wording
- Validation of rating scales
- Comprehensiveness of pre-coded questions
- Checks on length of time and possible fatigue
- Should allow for replicability

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

- Use at least three types of illustrations
- 4 in all, properly labelled
- Data should be properly edited and open-ended questions coded
- Pie charts show differences or similarities between groups or categories
- Bar graphs represent nominally scaled independent variables or data that forms a tally.
- Line graphs are used to display changes in a variable between groups over time or continuous data
- Other qualitative data can be shown by flow and Venn diagrams, tables and photos

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

In this section the results are explained.

- Describe the trends and patterns, averages, ranges, medians and what the data implies.
- Look for connections between data sets
- Explain the results; include contradictions
- Explain how the data connects to the topic
- Sometimes you may need to interpret more than one diagram together

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In order to write your Discussion you must go back to your Literature Review.

- Compare your results with those presented in the Literature Review. Look for similarities and differences in the patterns and trends of the studies.
- Try to account for any significant differences by comparing methodologies – research and sampling methods
- Mention any implications for policy.

CONCLUSIONS

This includes:

- Your aim/purpose
- Your results; mention and account for any exceptional/unexpected results
- A summary of where your research stands among the literature
- Your perspective on the problem

LIMITATIONS

These are the shortcomings of your study.

- See how your method, instrument and sampling may have affected your results
- Explain how changes in each/any of them would give a better/different answer to your problem statement

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Suggest about 3 recommendations to improve the problem you have studied. They should be practical and sensible solutions.
- Do not recommend activities or strategies which already exist as this shows a lack of knowledge of your problem

BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES

- This is a list of sources used to compile the study
- APA format is to be used(see hand-out)

APPENDICES

- Lists of raw data which could not be conveniently used in research paper but was crucial to the study.
- This is usually listed as Appendix I II III or A B C etc.
- These can include tally sheets, tables, pictures, maps or excerpts from books, articles and journals.