

A STUDY OF PRACTICAL ISSUES IN PLANNING A PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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Abstract: *The thrust of this paper is to examine practical issues in planning a psychological research. Introduction was the first segment to be featured, followed by formulating research questions. Assessing the practical feasibility of the research was adequately explained, consideration of the possible outcome of the research was discussed. Conclusion and recommendation were provided. It was recommended that researchers must always put into consideration practical issues when planning a research. It is important to note that decisions on practical issues may affect other sections of the research. This interdependence of decisions should always be borne in mind when planning a research.*

Keywords: Practical issues, Planning, Psychological Research

INTRODUCTION:

This paper is concerned with the assessment of practical issues which required to be considered when planning a research. If a psychological research is to achieve its intended goal, each of these issues requires careful considerations in the course of planning a research process. It is important to bear in mind that these decisions are interdependent of one another. For example, if you decide to use a certain statistical procedure, it will have implications on the minimum size to be used, if you are going to use interview, questionnaire or simple observations to gather data. This interdependence of different segment of the research means that the process of planning a psychological research is not made up of a simple sequence of events, instead, as we try to define certain theoretical concepts contained in the hypotheses which we want to test in our research, we have to think of ways of measuring these concepts in a particular setting, with different environment, type of participants. At the same time, we have to think about the accessibility to the participants, how do we get the required data within the required time span and within the availability of our resources in such a way that the method used for the research is appropriate and the instruments used to gather data can gather the data it is intended to gather, such that the data gathered can be analyze by the type of statistic which we used in testing the hypothesis from our starting point. The complex nature of the various decisions constitutes the planning process which should always be at the back of the mind of the researcher.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

From the afore-mentioned, one could see the complex nature of the interdependence of decisions affecting one another. One is also right to say that there are all sort of problems which can directly hamper psychological research and prevent it from achieving its intended target. It is the aim of this paper to highlight some of these problems in order to help those who are new in the field of research to minimize some of these anomalies.

FORMULATING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In selecting a topic of study one important step which needs to be taken when planning a psychological research is the identification and selection of a topic of study. There are a lot of reasons why psychologists pay attention to particular topics of research. Some may choose a topic because of personal interest, some for theoretical reason, they may have an assumption which they want to test empirically, some could be social problem, some may be interested in imparting the quality of life of the individual. All of these topics are valid. However, one crucial consideration in choosing a topic for research is to take into account whether the topic is feasible for study taking into consideration the practical restrictions on what the researcher is able to do.

THE NEED TO FORMULATE SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There is the need for a researcher to identify what exactly he wants to discover in his research. In other words, it is necessary to find out what is it that the researcher wants to find out from the topic. For example, might to study anxiety and believed that it is an important topic to study. Selecting this topic for research is not enough to enable us to say whether the intentionality of the research is visible or not.

The researcher should know exactly what he wants to find out about the topic. For example, does the researcher want to find out how anxiety in children varies with age? Or the factors that causes children to have anxiety, or how other people perceive children with anxiety or

what? Note that if the aim of the research is to know something about the selected topic, then it is always appropriate to state that aim in the form of a question. For example, how does children anxiety vary with their ages? What are the factors which cause anxiety in children? How do other people perceive children with anxiety?

Any intended research goal which cannot be formulated in a question form, then that research goal does not have a coherent goal. To further assess the feasibility of the research in question, the researcher further needs to qualify the research questions by mentioning the appropriate contexts which are of interest. For example, how do children in school, in the home, in the playground vary with age? When the researcher does this, he had further narrowed down the scope of the research to a manageable proportion. The feasibility of the research can now start to be ascertained against the criterion of interest. It is also not possible to study all children with anxiety. There is, therefore, the need to specify the age of the children who would be studied. Would the study cover children of all ages or children of a particular age? If so what age? Does the researcher have access to children of such ages? The term anxiety also needs to be defined in order to access the feasibility of the researcher.

STRATEGIES TO FOLLOW WHEN FORMULATING SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Several research questions may be used to help specific research topic which are suitable for research questions;

- 1) Articulate research questions in words
- 2) The articulated questions should contained specifications of the particular situations or conditions which the topic of interest will be studied as well as specifications of a particular type of participants to use in a research.
- 3) These questions should be articulated in such a way that they can be addressed by means of a specific empirical evidence
- 4) All questions must be empirically testable

CHOICE OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Having identified appropriate research questions and armed with operational definitions of terms, the researcher is then in a position to select the research design and methods of data collection which could be used to obtain the data to answer research questions.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Thorough review of any literature is an essential component of planning research. Literature contains accounts of all existing psychological theories and concepts which can be used to generate or structure research ideas. The existing literature contains a massive amount of information about the topics which have been investigated in the past, about specific research designs and methods which have been used by previous researchers. The existing literature can be used as an invaluable source from which to gather all sorts of research questions, topics, design, operational definition all of which can be adequately used to inform the process of planning research.

ACCESSING THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

There are two major ways of doing this:

- 1) Use the standard abstracting source. The most useful of such source is the psych INFO database. This is an outline database which contains the abstract of psychology journal, articles and psychology books and chapters which can be automatically searched by typing into the computer the key words which define the topics you are looking for.
- 2) You can also begin from the reference list of the central textbooks that have been written on the topic in which you are interested as well as any written empirical article which seem to be important. This reference list of both type of article can be used to locate further empirical articles. These methods of searching the literature must be accompanied by a systematic search. Although most recent issues of all the major journals which publish articles on the journal you are interested.
- 3) Whichever method is used to locate the relevant literature, the literature should be used for the entire planning process.

ASSESSING PRACTICAL FEASIBILITY OF THE RESEARCH

The first thing to consider under this category is the participants required for the research. What type of participants do you require? With which characteristics? In which location/situation or context? How many participants are needed and is the number available for the researcher? If the answers to all these questions are satisfactory, additional questions need to be asked; are the participants ready to participate in the study? How do you control participants dropping out from the study while it is in progress? Or participants not complying with the research procedure.

SAMPLING OF MATERIALS REQUIRED FOR THE RESEARCH

In assessing the feasibility of the research, the researcher must always consider all equipment and materials required for the research. Does the researcher possess all the materials and equipment needed for the research? If not and they have to be purchase, does he have enough budget that will take care of such materials and equipment, if not, what other alternative do you have on ground? Does the materials and equipment have any technical problem that needed to be tested to eliminate such problem at the time of need?

If it requires the researcher to learn how to use these equipment and materials does he has adequate time to learn its usage? There is therefore the need to develop effective timetable during the planning process.

All consumable items required to carry out the research must be properly budgeted to ensure that the funds required for the research do not exceed the total budget.

PILOT WORK

When all the materials, equipment and funds needed to cover the research are available, the next thing is to conduct a pilot study to try out in advance the full scale study itself. Pilot group should be conducted using smaller group of participants who have similar characteristics to those of the participants who will be used in the main study. Pilot work can be used to the various operational definitions and research methods which are still under active consideration. Pilot work can also be used to establish whether participants understand instructions, to determine how much time it will take each participant to get practice in all the segments of the research.

The choice of statistical analysis will be determined by the research design and the type of data that will be collected and by the research question posed by the research. It is then necessary to check the sample size and the availability of the participants who are required for the study.

CONCLUSION

- 1) Assessing practical issue regarding a piece of research is clearly a complex process.
- 2) Different aspect of research requires careful control in order to ensure that the research is feasible in practice. If the research proves infeasible in one segment, it may be necessary to revise the entire study.
- 3) If a research turns out not to be feasible, it is always important to consider possible modification before abandoning it entirely and starting from the scratch once again.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) To achieve a research goal, careful decisions need to be made during the planning process.
- 2) Formulate specific research questions, state exactly what you want find out about the topic.
- 3) Identify and select participants, equipment, materials and consumables required for the research.
- 4) Conduct a pilot study in order to try out the methods, materials and equipment in advance before running full scale study.

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