

Common Challenges in Writing Scientific Research in Social and Human Sciences

المغالطات المنهجية في كتابة الأبحاث العلمية في العلوم الاجتماعية والإنسانية

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Abstract (English):

Writing scientific research in the social and human sciences is a fundamental task that contributes to the development of human knowledge, a deeper understanding of societies and cultures, and the progress of peoples. However, researchers in these fields face several challenges that can hinder the achievement of their research goals. These challenges range from difficulties in precisely defining research hypotheses to identifying appropriate methodologies, from data analysis to the objective interpretation of results. Social and human sciences require researchers to integrate theoretical knowledge with critical analysis, which complicates the research process.

Therefore, this article aims to highlight the most prominent challenges and pitfalls that researchers have encountered in different studies. We will also highlight effective strategies to overcome these challenges, thereby improving the quality of scientific research and contributing to the advancement of knowledge in these important areas.

Keywords: Methodological pitfalls, scientific writing, quality of scientific research, social sciences, humanities.

ملخص باللغة العربية:

إن كتابة الأبحاث العلمية في مجال العلوم الاجتماعية والإنسانية من المهام الأساسية التي تسهم في تطوير المعرفة البشرية وفهم المجتمعات والثقافات بعمق والارتقاء بالشعوب، ومع ذلك، يواجه الباحثون في هذه المجالات تحديات عدة قد تعيق تحقيق أهدافهم البحثية، تتراوح هذه التحديات تارة بين صعوبة تحديد الفرضيات البحثية بدقة، وتارة أخرى في تحديد المنهجيات المناسبة، وصولاً إلى تحليل البيانات وتفسير النتائج بشكل موضوعي. فالعلوم الاجتماعية والإنسانية تتطلب من الباحثين دمج المعرفة النظرية مع التحليل النقدي، مما يزيد من تعقيد عملية البحث. وعليه نسعى من خلال هذا المقال للتذكير ولفت الانتباه إلى أبرز التحديات والهفوات التي صارت شائعة ومتداولة بين الباحثين في العديد من الأبحاث والدراسات، وسنسلط الضوء على الأساليب الفعالة لتجاوزها، مما يسهم في تعزيز جودة الأبحاث العلمية والإسهام في تقدم المعرفة في هذه المجالات الحيوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهفوات المنهجية، الكتابة العلمية، جودة الأبحاث العلمية، العلوم الاجتماعية، العلوم الإنسانية.

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of scientific research depends on the robustness of its formal and methodological aspects, the validity of the knowledge material and the adherence to scientific integrity. Scientific research, whether in the experimental, human or social sciences, aims to study various phenomena and problems that hinder progress and prosperity, with the aim of finding solutions and alternatives to these problems and overcoming obstacles to development in society. Conducting scientific research requires a certain degree of precision and care, as it requires the researcher to follow a series of steps and stages in order to produce original research of scientific value.

In addition, following the methodological steps outlined by researchers and specialists ensures that the researcher arrives at results characterized by accuracy, generalizability and measurability, thus enabling the completion of scientifically valuable research that can serve as a reference. In addition, following methodological steps and using research techniques and tools enhances the researcher's ability to understand, interpret, judge and draw conclusions.

Scientific research is based on fundamental rules, principles and essential steps that every researcher or student must follow. These steps are sequential and interdependent, making it impossible to conduct scientific research in a haphazard, disorganised or unstructured manner.

However, despite the researcher's commitment to follow the steps of scientific research, and despite the vast number of books, studies and articles published on methodology and research steps, many researchers often fall into methodological pitfalls and errors that prevent them from producing research of the desired quality. This leads to negative perceptions and a lack of confidence in the results they produce. This issue is therefore of great importance and serves as a marker for the quality of scientific research. It compels us to work on identifying the research challenges that may be overlooked by researchers in their busy schedules, thereby increasing their awareness of these pitfalls and encouraging them to address and avoid them in the pursuit of accuracy and effectiveness.

We therefore propose the following question: Given that methodological errors have become so widespread that researchers may not always notice them in their work, since it is possible to avoid these errors, we ask: **What are the main pitfalls and methodological slips that researchers and students encounter in their scientific research?**

I. Methodological errors in the formulation of the research problem and hypotheses

1. Identifying questions related to the research problem:

The logical sequence in the study of any topic begins with the recognition and articulation of the problem. The concept of a research problem involves questions that need to be answered. Selecting the research problem or topic is often the most difficult stage in the research process, as researchers face many difficulties in choosing their research focus.

However, reviewing previous studies and integrating them into the problem formulation allows researchers to develop a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the research question, enriching it by familiarising themselves with the theoretical heritage, different theoretical frameworks, hypotheses and methodologies used. Despite this, researchers often make several mistakes when formulating the research problem, including: (Sawla Fayrouz, 29/12/2015)

a. Confusing the definition of the research problem with the definition of the study variables:

Many researchers tend to rely on ready-made definitions drawn directly from dictionaries and reference books when framing their research problem, without making the effort to adapt or contextualize those definitions within their specific study. By doing so, they skip a fundamental step — identifying and clearly defining the core concepts that underpin their research.

The real purpose of defining terms at this stage is not merely to explain words, but to construct a broad conceptual foundation for the study, guiding the reader progressively from a general understanding of the topic down to its more specific dimensions.

b. Neglecting the logical and temporal order of study variables or related aspects

Some researchers present or frame their research problem in an incoherent and poorly structured way. A common example of this is when a researcher opens the discussion at a local level, then shifts to a national context, only to suddenly leap to a global perspective — with no logical progression between these layers. This constitutes a methodological flaw, as a well-constructed research problem demands a clear and orderly sequence in how the relevant events, conditions, or dimensions of the phenomenon are introduced and discussed.

C. Answering the main question when defining the research problem:

Researchers frequently overlook the importance of this pivotal stage in problem definition. A telling example of this is when a researcher elaborates on the theoretical dimensions of a topic

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yet fails to directly engage with the central research question or any of its subsidiary questions. It is quite common to find passages that draw on theoretical insights from experts or prior studies related to the study's key variables — yet the researchers behind such work often fail to recognize a fundamental methodological mistake: every theoretical idea or reference cited at this stage must directly speak to and address the main research question or the sub-questions the study sets out to answer.

D. Neglecting one variable in favour of another:

This involves overemphasising one variable at the expense of others. For example, a researcher may devote two or more paragraphs to one variable, while neglecting the second or other variables in the study if it involves multiple variables. In this way, the researcher overlooks one or more of the essential variables mentioned in the title, and the study becomes disproportionately biased towards one variable. Another common mistake is the inadequate and vague definition of variables, where the researcher rushes through the process of defining the basic concepts of the study, limiting himself to linguistic and terminological definitions of the study's variables, without adequately addressing the real problem and exploring its components and the relationships between its variables. This can result in a verbose content that obscures the real problem of the study.

E. Errors related to the questions:

Some prominent errors that researchers make in formulating their questions include:

1. Confusing questions with hypotheses.
2. Asking vague and non-measurable questions.
3. Formulating questions that have known answers in advance, which are not acceptable as research questions because logically the answers should remain unknown until the study is completed.
4. Starting questions with “does” or “is”, leading to binary answers of yes or no.
5. Creating complex questions, such as “To what extent is female delinquency influenced by the economic, educational and cultural level of the family?”
6. Asking ambitious questions that exceed the researcher's skills and available resources.
7. Developing questions that are not related to the research problem.
8. Not specifying whether the questions are descriptive, comparative or relational.

W. Errors in the formulation of research hypotheses:

Hypotheses, need to be formulated in clear and specific language, avoiding ambiguous words or multiple meanings that could lead to different interpretations. This requires researchers to use scientifically precise terminology.

Despite this, researchers often make the following mistakes when formulating research hypotheses (Taher, 2021, p319):

1. **Focusing on a single variable:** A common mistake is for a researcher to formulate one or two hypotheses that focus solely on one variable, neglecting a key variable mentioned in the research title or an intermediate variable whose role and importance is clarified in the research problem (Khidr, 6/3/2013)

2. **Ignoring hypotheses altogether:** Some researchers fail to propose any hypotheses or propose unclear hypotheses that are poorly formulated and do not clarify the variables to be measured.

II. Formulating research hypotheses

Hypotheses are simply defined as proposed solutions or mental conjectures that researchers use to guide their data collection processes. They represent potential solutions to problems that can be validated or invalidated. Therefore, hypotheses need to be formulated in clear and specific language, avoiding ambiguous terms that could have multiple meanings or interpretations. This requires the use of precise scientific terminology. In addition, hypotheses must be testable and verifiable, as there is little point in proposing hypotheses that are difficult to measure, either because of their subject matter or because of the lack of available measurement tools. However, researchers often make mistakes in formulating research hypotheses in the following ways (Asya Hafi, October 2018,p17):

- Focusing on a single variable: A common mistake is for researchers to formulate one or two hypotheses that focus solely on one variable, neglecting significant variables mentioned in the research title or main research question. This includes ignoring key or intermediate variables whose roles and importance have been clarified in the research problem.

- Ignoring research hypotheses: Researchers may fail to formulate hypotheses at all, or formulate unclear, poorly constructed hypotheses that do not specify the variables to be measured.

- Formulating hypotheses that imply certainty: hypotheses may be formulated in such a way as to indicate that the researcher or student is confident of statistically significant differences, despite a lack of clear evidence to support this assumption, leading to premature conclusions before the research has been carried out (Al-Mahi, 2022,p183).

- Confusion between research hypotheses and statistical hypotheses: Research hypotheses are typically formulated in a declarative manner using simple, concise statements, whereas

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statistical hypotheses are expressed mathematically and tested using various statistical methods. In addition, researchers may fail to specify the levels of statistical significance in null or alternative hypotheses, simply stating differences or variations between independent or related samples.

- Lack of scientific basis: Research hypotheses may not be supported by scientific principles or may conflict with established literature, and they may be formulated in unclear, ambiguous language that is open to multiple interpretations.

III. Methodological inconsistencies regarding the importance of the topic and the justification for its selection:

1. A common pitfall is to overstate the aims of the study and the reasons for choosing the topic: a researcher might state in the aims of the study: "We want to enrich the theoretical aspect of the topic!" However, a researcher cannot derive scientific knowledge solely from a theoretical discussion in a thesis, whether at bachelor's or master's level. It would be better to replace this with the aim of giving the researcher more training in research methods. In addition, if the researcher cites the lack of previous studies on the topic as a reason for choosing it, the term "lack" should be replaced with "scarcity" or "few studies" on the topic, as the researcher's exposure during the initial stages remains very limited.

In order to differentiate these points, the researcher or student should ask a question for each of them (Abdullah, 2004, p44):

- Reasons for choosing the topic: Why does the researcher want to know?
- Significance of the study: What is the importance and impact of the topic in terms of its knowledge value or its danger as a problem to be solved, and how does it affect the social, economic or cultural reality?
- Aim of the study: In this study, we want to understand so and so (the researcher presents the aim of the study), which means to uncover the cause or causes of the problem.

The question corresponding to the aims of the study is What does the researcher want to know? Or what do we want to achieve? This means that the aims should include a tentative answer contained in the hypotheses of the study, thus indicating the expected results of the study (Maurice, 2006, p106)

2. Errors in reviewing and using previous studies (Al-Mahi, 2022, p182):

By reviewing previous research, the researcher can identify the most appropriate tools and methods for their own study, helping them to avoid the mistakes made by others and to benefit from their experience. This process also allows the researcher to easily interpret and analyse

their results, or to discuss whether their findings are consistent with or different from those of previous studies.

The ultimate aim of reviewing previous research is to enrich the current study. There are two important questions that the researcher should always keep in mind when reviewing previous studies: Are all the studies presented relevant to and supportive of the research problem? Do I critically analyse and evaluate these studies (Fattah, 2011,p16)?

We can summarise what **Dr. Rabhi Mustafa Aliyan** said about the mistakes made in the presentation and use of previous studies in the following points (Alyan, 2001,p325):

1. Rushed review of previous studies: This haste may cause the researcher to overlook important information relevant to their research.

2. Lack of chronological order: Researchers often fail to present studies in chronological order, such as discussing a study from 2012, followed by one from 2009, and then another from 2014, etc.

3. Over-reliance on secondary sources: Excessive reliance on secondary sources of information can diminish the role of the researcher in seeking out specific information that serves their research. A methodological error occurs when a researcher quotes extensive information from these studies, even if they acknowledge them as sources.

4. Ethical issues: Ethical concerns arise when excessive citation occurs without proper acknowledgement of the original study as the source of information.

5. Narrow review of sources: Reviewing only one type of previous study to the exclusion of others.

In addition, we can highlight the findings of researcher **Faisal Ahmed Abdel Fattah** regarding the mistakes researchers make in presenting previous studies, which can be summarised as follows (Lahsan Dhibihi, 2017,p11):

6. Heavy reliance on secondary sources: Researchers often rely too much on secondary information instead of consulting original sources or repeatedly citing a single primary source in the chapter on previous studies.

- Accepting the results of previous studies as validated and beyond criticism, without examining the content of the research in terms of its design, data analysis or conclusions drawn.
- Failure to clarify the methodology and data collection methods used in previous research.

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- Including numerical statistical results without questioning them or extracting important information, resulting in the researcher simply cutting and pasting excerpts from the original source.
- Failure to discuss contradictions in previous viewpoints and not clarifying the differences between them or presenting the researcher's opinion.
- Assigning a standardised template for the presentation of previous studies or a fixed number of lines, knowing that some studies may require only one paragraph, while others may require several.
- Presenting and summarising previous studies in their entirety, focusing only on what is relevant to the research topic and its variables.
- Citing a lack of Arab studies, or even generalising beyond this to claim a lack of studies in the same area.

So Previous studies should be documented according to rigorous scientific principles, as follows (Yahiaoui, 2021,p324): the name and title of the researcher, the title of the study, the type of study (conference paper, scientific research, master's thesis, doctoral dissertation, etc.),the methodology and tools used, the study sample and the spatial and temporal scope of the study, and then presents the results obtained. The researcher then comments on the study by clarifying:

Points of convergence and divergence on the subject and the relationship between its variables (Bouzidi, June 2018,p 147):

1. Clarifying the findings and objectives: Explain the findings and limitations of the previous study and the objectives the student is trying to achieve.
2. Theoretical and methodological orientation: Clarify how the previous study can inform the theoretical, methodological and procedural aspects of the current research.
3. Identification of methodological flaws: Identify the methodological flaws in the previous study and explain how the student will benefit from or avoid these flaws.

IV. Methodological challenges for the researcher

Methodology is defined as the approach a researcher takes to answer the questions raised by the research problem. Many researchers encounter various pitfalls related to methodology and procedures, which can be summarised as follows:

1. Methodological and procedural pitfalls:

- **Confusion between research methodology and research method:** Methodology refers to the overall approach adopted by a researcher from the initiation of the research to its

completion, including guidelines, tools and techniques that support the research. In contrast, a method refers to the logic and ways of reasoning and deducing.

- **Mixed method and methodological approaches:** Method refers to logic and the means of arriving at truth using specific cognitive tools, whereas methodological approaches refer to the rules and frameworks used to view social phenomena.

- **Confusion between types of research and types of methods:** There are different types of research, such as exploratory and descriptive studies. A researcher may use one or more methods appropriate to the needs of descriptive research.

- **Failure to justify the use of the method:** Failure to give reasons for choosing a particular method over others.

2. Errors Related to Appropriate Research Tools (Owais, 1997,p08):

- **Poor Selection of Data Collection Tools:** Relying solely on one data collection tool for the research.

- **Poor Selection of Sample and Procedures:** Each scientific study has its research population and sample. The research population refers to all individuals and items that are the subject of the research problem, encompassing all aspects of the phenomenon being studied.

- **Failure to Differentiate Between the Study Population and the Sample:** The researcher must first define the study population. If the study population is small, a sample is not used. Conversely, if the study population is large, a sample is used, and the researcher should indicate the original population of the study along with the size and type of sample employed.

- **Failure to Differentiate Between Sample and Sampling Procedures:** A sample is a subset of elements from a specific research population, while sampling consists of processes that allow for selecting a subset from the research population to form a sample. This often includes methods for calculating sample size from the research population, as well as techniques or procedures for selecting sample members.

- **The sample may not be representative of the study population:** Selecting samples that are not representative of the study population in terms of size or characteristics undermines the credibility of the results and makes it impossible to generalise the findings to the research population.

- **Failure to define sampling procedures and methods for calculating sample size:** The method used to draw the sample from the study population is often not specified. While the study

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population, sample type and sample size may be mentioned, the procedures for sampling individuals - whether purposive or probabilistic - are often omitted.

The main points that researchers should avoid include (Sawla Fayrouz,2015,p74):

- Writing in correct language: Use appropriate words and terminology for the research.
- Avoiding the passive voice: avoiding phrases like “it was mentioned” or “it was said”, as clarity about facts and their sources is crucial in scientific research.
- Avoid ambiguous sentences: Avoid using sentences that present multiple possibilities, as this can lead to confusion for the reader or discussant.
- Clearly state the research problem: The research problem should be formulated in a scientific manner, without any literary embellishment.
- Avoid Verbose Language: Avoid ornate phrases and grandiloquent expressions that have no place in scientific research.
- Respect Punctuation: Ensure proper use of punctuation, such as colons, when presenting detailed ideas or sub-elements, or in subheadings.
- Respecting other punctuation rules: the correct use of question marks, exclamation marks, quotation marks, parentheses, brackets and dashes.

V. Errors Related to Proper Citation and Documentation of References:

A reliable scientific research paper must include all essential components, one of which is a list of references, whether they are previous studies or citations of certain phrases. Documentation practices may vary based on the source's type and field. For example, referencing books differs from citing newspaper articles or online sources. A valuable research paper employs accurate and optimal documentation methods, allowing readers to easily identify and analyze the sources, whether they are books, journals, etc. However, researchers often fall into various citation and documentation errors, including (Hajjam, 2015,p43):

- Failure to properly document references, whether printed or electronic.
- Failure to identify common ideas and concepts in footnotes.
- Using references that are unrelated to the research problem or citing outdated references that do not highlight the current relevance of the research.
- Including an exhaustive list of all references consulted in the plan, rather than selectively including only those references actually used in the preparation of the plan. Researchers should not limit themselves to listing references in footnotes without including them at the end of the plan.
- This is because excessive citation dilutes the researcher's voice, and an abundance of footnotes on a single page can obscure the researcher's thought process. In addition, excessive

citation disrupts the flow of ideas and the quality of language used, and ultimately compromises the researcher's scholarly style due to the different styles of the authors whose opinions are cited (Fatima, 2020,p58).

Conclusion:

In summary, it is clear that scientific research has its shortcomings. However, this should not be an excuse for researchers to ignore these errors. We must be aware of these pitfalls to avoid them. These errors can be categorized into methodological errors and other types, including linguistic and technical errors. Undoubtedly, these pitfalls negatively impact the progress and results of research.

Researchers need to thoroughly scrutinize each stage of their research process, as even minor errors can compromise scientific credibility and pose difficulties for pre-publication evaluators and reviewers. In the worst scenarios, these mistakes might result in the rejection of the scientific work and, at worst, lead to severe criticism and necessitate revisions. Consequently, preparing a scientific study or research must adhere to a structured approach and steps grounded in stringent scientific principles. Researchers, irrespective of their academic standing, must adhere to these steps and stages to avoid common pitfalls that have become widespread among researchers and students. To ensure that scientific research is organized and accurate, researchers must follow specific stages that include all the methods, tools, and techniques required to conduct the research.

Therefore, it is essential for researchers to become acquainted with the literature and references relating to methodologies and research steps and to adhere to the established guidelines and techniques to ultimately produce research that meets scientific standards and is free from errors that could undermine its academic value (Brih, 2017).

Results:

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, the possibility of avoiding these pitfalls is manageable through simple measures that correct and refine the research and place it in its proper context, as outlined in the following recommendations:

1. Define the problem: Here the researcher begins with a preamble, without explicitly labelling it as such, then introduces the reader to the problem and its significance.

2. Specifying the problem: In this section, the researcher states and justifies that the topic has multiple facets that are relevant to his or her study, and that he or she will focus on specific aspects that he or she wishes to investigate.

3. Determine the historical (temporal) context of the study: This specification is not required in all research, but is necessary in studies that need to define the timeframe to be studied.

4. Relying on Credible Sources: Researchers should focus on gathering information from reliable and diverse scientific sources to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of their studies.

Continuous Training: Researchers are advised to continually develop their research and analytical skills through training courses and scientific seminars.

5. Effective Use of Methodologies: Researchers must choose appropriate research methodologies for their topics and apply them correctly to ensure reliable results.

6. Scientific Communication: Researchers are encouraged to communicate with colleagues in their field to share ideas and feedback and benefit from others' experiences.

7. Commitment to Scientific Ethics: It is important for researchers to adhere to ethical standards in data collection, analysis, and presentation of results.

8. Improving Academic Writing Skills: Researchers should invest in developing their academic writing skills, including the ability to formulate clear hypotheses and present arguments logically and coherently.

9. Deepening Understanding of Cultural and Social Context: Researchers should study the cultural and social contexts of the communities they research, enhancing their ability to interpret results accurately and meaningfully.

10. Developing Data Analysis Techniques: Researchers must learn and use modern data analysis tools that are suitable for the qualitative and quantitative nature of data in social and human sciences.

11. Encouraging Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Collaborating with researchers from other disciplines can provide new insights and different analytical perspectives, enriching the research and enhancing its comprehensiveness.

12. Focusing on Continuous Evaluation: Researchers are advised to conduct periodic evaluations of their studies at different stages to ensure they are on the right track and to make necessary adjustments when needed.

13. Benefiting from Feedback: Receiving feedback from supervisors and peers can be invaluable for improving the quality of the research and advancing it.

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- Ahmed Ibrahim Khidr: Twenty Mistakes Researchers Make When Preparing Their Research Plans, Al-Iluka Network, 6/3/2013.
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- Twenty mistakes researchers make when preparing their research plans, see the link: https://www.alukah.net/personal_pages/0/51368/البحثية-خططهم-إعداد-عند-الباحثون-فيما-يقع-خطأ-عشرون/