

Identifying Research Gaps in Social Sciences

اكتشاف الثغرات البحثية في العلوم الاجتماعية

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Abstract:

Social science research must prioritize identifying gaps to solve societal problems. This article explores the concept of research gaps and their significance in driving social progress and enhancing the quality of social science research, and outlines strategies for uncovering them through exploratory methods. Challenges researchers face in gap identification are examined, including volume of past research and time constraints. It is argued that neglecting gap analysis diminishes the quality of social research. Recommendations are made for researchers to invest in exploratory processes to enhance the value of their work.

Keywords: research gaps, social sciences, exploratory research, research quality

JEL Classification Codes:..., ..., ...

ملخص:

البحث العلمي في العلوم الاجتماعية يخضع سيرة منطوية ومنهجية، تتيح للباحث أن يحقق أهدافه البحثية بدقة وفعالية، وأن يضفي على عمله المعرفي صبغة علمية. إن كل مرحلة من مراحل البحث تشكل حلقة أساسية ضمن سلسلة متكاملة، لكننا لاحظنا أن مرحلة البحث الاستطلاعي بالذات شبه مهملة من طرف عديد الباحثين، بالإضافة إلى قلة الاهتمام باكتشاف الثغرات البحثية.

ذلك ما دفعنا إلى التساؤل عن العلاقة بين البحث الاستطلاعي والثغرات البحثية، حيث نتناول من خلال هذا المقال تحليل طبيعة هذه العلاقة، عبر تحديد المفاهيم الأساسية، إبراز دور العمل الاستطلاعي في تمكين

الباحث من رصد الثغرات البحثية، بمختلف أنواعها، كما يتضمن المقال محاولة تفسير لعوامل ضعف الاهتمام باكتشاف الثغرات البحثية في البحوث الاجتماعية من خلال مجموعة من العوائق الذاتية والموضوعية. **كلمات مفتاحية:** الثغرات البحثية، العلوم الاجتماعية، البحث الاستطلاعي، جودة البحث العلمي. تصنيفات JEL: ،..... ،....

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1. INTRODUCTION

Science has profoundly impacted human civilization, enabling extraordinary advancements in our understanding of ourselves and the universe. As Perutz (1989/1999) notes, "Scientists have transformed the way we live, a change that surpasses in its intensity the changes brought about by television personalities, government officials, and generals" (p. 9). However, in today's world, scientific research must prioritize not only material progress but also seek to address critical social and civilizational challenges. By focusing on quality, effectiveness, and creativity, social science research can play a vital role in tackling the complex human problems we face.

The role of the social researcher carries immense responsibility, as their work can profoundly shape the trajectory of society. Social research goes beyond merely discovering new knowledge—it expands our ability to apply that knowledge to understand and influence human affairs. Berger and Luckmann (1966) highlight the "inevitable historicity of human thought", emphasizing how ideas and knowledge are shaped by their historical and cultural context. This is exemplified by Pascal's famous observation that "what is truth on one side of the Pyrenees is error on the other" (as cited in Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 17). The sociology of knowledge recognizes this social construction and relativity of knowledge, investigating "the concrete relationships between thought and its historical situations" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 17). Consequently, social researchers must navigate the complex interaction between their work and the broader scientific, professional, and cultural communities in which they operate.

Moreover, the development and application of scientific methodologies in the social sciences often reflect the dominant political and economic climate. Miles et al. (1979) trace how the evolution of statistical methods was significantly influenced by the needs and interests of the ruling class in the context of industrial capitalism. In the 18th century, political stability meant the landowner class had little use for statistics. However, the social upheavals of 19th century industrialization prompted the state and private organizations to increasingly turn to statistical methods to study and manage society, laying the groundwork for the modern welfare state (p. 31-34). Today, these statistical approaches form the basis of epidemiological studies that permeate medical and psychological research, closely tied to government funding and the influence of pharmaceutical industry interests. Given this context, it is crucial for social researchers to critically examine and question the assumptions, methods, and implications of their work.

Despite the importance of social science research, current practices often fall short in terms of methodological rigor, critical thinking depth, and innovative creativity. Rayees (2017) highlights the paradox between the increasing quantity of social science research and the lack of corresponding qualitative advancements. One key factor contributing to this discrepancy is researchers' failure to adequately identify research gaps, particularly during the exploratory stage of topic development. Uncovering these gaps is crucial for advancing scientific knowledge and ensuring that research meaningfully contributes to social progress. As the outcomes of social research can have far-reaching implications for individuals and societies, it is more important than ever for researchers to prioritize the identification of research gaps and strive for excellence in their work.

In this article, we aim to explore the concept of research gaps and their critical role in advancing scientific knowledge and driving social progress. Specifically, we will address the following questions:

1. What is the concept of a research gap, and what are its fundamental dimensions?
2. How does identifying research gaps contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge in the social sciences and the resolution of human and societal problems?

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3. What strategies can researchers employ to identify research gaps, and what is the role of the exploratory phase in this process?

4. What are the potential causes and consequences of neglecting research gaps, and how does this impact the practice of academic social research?

By investigating these questions, we seek to shed light on the key role of research gap identification in elevating the quality, relevance, and impact of social science research. Ultimately, a deeper understanding of research gaps can help guide researchers in designing studies that meaningfully contribute to the knowledge base and drive positive change in our communities. Investing in rigorous and impactful social research is essential for navigating the risks and opportunities of the postmodern era.

2. Selecting an Optimal Research Topic

Social science research pursues a variety of important objectives simultaneously, including description, classification, explanation, understanding, discovery, invention, control, and prediction of social phenomena. The specific research topic forms the foundation around which all of the researcher's thoughts and activities revolve. As Mace and Pétry (2000) assert, "the quality of the research project and the success of the research itself are contingent upon factors that intervene during the research topic selection stage" (p. 9). Choosing an optimal research topic is crucial, as it sets the stage for the entire research process.

To ensure the best outcomes, researchers must carefully select a research topic that balances theoretical significance, societal importance, and their own interests and capabilities. While it may not be possible to perfectly align all of these factors, the optimal topic should satisfy as many key criteria as possible. Mace and Pétry (2000) summarize some of the most important considerations, including "personal interest and inclination, political and social significance, topicality, abundance of prior studies, presence of a suitable theoretical framework, ability to obtain sufficient field data, and capacity to employ necessary research methods and techniques" (pp. 9-12). Furthermore, the optimal research topic must be realistically achievable given the constraints the researcher faces. It should align with the researcher's

available resources, intellectual capacities, and time. The topic must address an actual, urgent issue of theoretical or practical concern in order to sustain the researcher's motivation through the challenges of the research process. As Mace and Pétry (2000) emphasize, "to ensure high-quality completion, the best research topic should be achievable, applicable, and accessible to the researcher's available resources, intellectual capacities, and time constraints" (p. 10).

In addition to being feasible, the optimal research topic should make a meaningful contribution to the researcher's field. By focusing on core issues within their discipline or exploring questions at the intersection of adjacent fields, researchers can best leverage their existing scientific, theoretical, and methodological knowledge. Moreover, the research should aim to provide valuable academic or social benefits by offering solutions or answers to practical individual or societal problems. The ultimate goal is to generate insights or solutions that can help ease problems faced by individuals, communities, or society, even if these solutions are not permanent (Mace and Pétry, 2000).

However, while the nature and characteristics of the research topic are crucial, they alone are not sufficient for successful social science research. As Paugam (2012) argues, proficient researchers must "combine creative scientific imagination, epistemological rupture, and methodological rigor in their research practice" (p. 2). This combination captures the difficulty, complexity, and creativity required in the research process. Furthermore, researchers must also incorporate critical thinking to counter the influence of subjective factors, cognitive biases, and cultural and academic pressures. Quality in social science research requires a combination of an optimal research topic, a rigorous and creative approach, and meticulous critical analysis to identify and address research gaps. When these elements come together harmoniously, social science research can make important contributions to our understanding of the social world.

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3. Defining Research Gaps

Defining the term "research gap" is crucial for ensuring consistency and clarity in scientific literature. Several related terms, such as "scientific gap," "cognitive gap," "theoretical gap," and "societal gap," are often used in surveys, leading to potential confusion. By establishing a clear definition of a research gap, researchers can communicate their findings more effectively and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their field.

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses play a vital role in addressing research gaps and improving the quality of recommendations in guidelines. Wang et al. (2016) analyzed 133 WHO guidelines and found that 20% reported content related to "research gap," with the identified gaps varying in topics, interventions, target populations, settings, and study types. The WHO Guideline Handbook (2014) emphasizes the importance of describing knowledge gaps and suggesting questions and methods for addressing them when significant uncertainty exists. By focusing on the research gaps outlined in guidelines, researchers can provide high-quality evidence to support future recommendations.

A research gap refers to a knowledge-related aspect that has not been scientifically studied before in a particular research topic, phenomenon, question, hypothesis, research community, time, or social group. Angers (2004) identified five sources of questions that might motivate research: lack of knowledge, methodological errors, doubts about generalizability, contradictory findings, and untested theories or models. These sources highlight the various ways in which research gaps can arise and the need for further investigation.

Well-constructed research problem statements are essential for ensuring logic and communicating the purpose of scholarly work. Jacobs (2011) suggests a framework of six forms in which research problems can arise through the analysis and synthesis of information: Provocative Exception, Contradictory Evidence, Knowledge Void, Action-Knowledge Conflict, Methodological Conflict, And Theoretical Conflict. This framework provides a systematic approach for identifying research problems by considering the interactions

and discrepancies between different sets of information.

Furthermore, explicitly identifying and characterizing research gaps using a structured framework can enable systematic reviews to inform the types of questions that need to be addressed and the studies needed to address them effectively. Robinson et al. (2011) developed a two-part framework that first uses the PICOS elements (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, and Setting) to identify where the evidence falls short, and then categorizes the reasons behind the research gap into four main types: insufficient or imprecise information, biased information, inconsistency, and not the right information. By applying this framework, researchers can identify research gaps more systematically and comprehensively, leading to more evidence-based research and decision-making.

In addition to Robinson et al.'s framework, Müller-Bloch and Kranz (2015) developed a framework specifically tailored for qualitative reviews in the Information Systems field, drawing upon Jacobs' (2011) classification of research problems. While their model differs in terms of target domain and underlying methodology, both aim to systematically identify research gaps and guide researchers in conducting systematic literature reviews to locate areas that need further investigation.

Understanding and categorizing different types of research gaps is crucial for developing research agendas and pursuing new lines of inquiry. Miles (2017), building upon the work of Robinson et al. (2011) and Müller-Bloch and Kranz (2014), proposed a comprehensive taxonomy of seven types of research gaps that helps researchers systematically identify gaps in prior literature:

Evidence Gap: Findings from different studies are contradictory when looked at from a higher level, even if the individual study conclusions are valid.

Knowledge Gap: The desired research findings simply do not exist yet, either in the field itself or in related research areas. Results may also differ from expectations.

Practical-Knowledge Gap: There is a discrepancy between the actual behavior of professionals in the field and the behavior advocated by research. Research is needed to determine the extent of and reasons for this gap.

Methodological Gap: Using varied research methods, rather than a single

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common method, is necessary to generate new insights and avoid distorted findings.

Empirical Gap: Existing research findings or propositions still need to be empirically evaluated and verified through studies.

Theoretical Gap: Applying theory to certain research issues can provide new insights. A lack of relevant theory indicates a gap exists. Evaluating whether some theories are superior to others in explaining a phenomenon also reveals theoretical gaps.

Population Gap: Certain populations have been under-researched relative to others in the existing evidence base, such as specific genders, races/ethnicities, or age groups. More research is needed on these underrepresented groups.

Farooq (2017) defined a research gap as "a research question which has not been addressed properly" (p. 67) and proposed a framework for identifying research gaps in social sciences based on a systematic review of the literature. The framework was developed to address the difficulty novice researchers face in identifying research gaps due to the lack of clear criteria or procedures. It includes dimensions such as citation analysis, content analysis, meta-analysis, systematic reviews, future research suggestions, and limitations of past studies (p. 70-74). By leveraging these dimensions, the framework provides a systematic approach for researchers to identify research gaps. Farooq also outlined a process involving identifying a broad area, methods of identification, feasibility, selection of gap, and expected outcomes. The proposed framework and process offer a structured way for social science researchers, particularly those new to the field, to identify research gaps by utilizing citation analysis, systematic reviews, and study limitations.

Although the proposed framework provides researchers with a model for conducting a literature review, it remains challenging to determine research gaps in qualitative studies. However, content analysis, a technique used in qualitative research to make inferences by interpreting texts, images, and documents, can be employed to identify research gaps in this area (Farooq, 2017, p. 71).

According to Müller-Bloch and Kranz (2015), the chart method, also referred to as a concept matrix, is the only known approach for identifying research gaps in qualitative literature reviews. This method involves categorizing each source according to predefined criteria, such as the types of variables examined, levels of analysis, gaps in the literature, or other significant theoretical issues (Webster and Watson, 2002). The process begins by creating a matrix with the reviewed sources listed in one column and the established categories forming the other columns. The researcher then marks each source's coverage of the respective categories using checkmarks or crosses.

Upon completing the chart, patterns emerge, revealing potential gaps in research where few or no sources address a particular category. These gaps, represented by empty cells or sparsely populated columns, serve as the foundation for developing research questions and proposing future research areas. The visual nature of the chart method facilitates the identification of well-researched areas and those that have been neglected or understudied.

While this method provides a systematic approach to identifying research gaps, it offers limited guidance on the cognitive process involved in defining specific gaps and questions. Ultimately, the interpretation of the matrix patterns is left to the researcher's analysis (Müller-Bloch and Kranz, 2015).

4. Identifying Research Gaps

The history of science demonstrates the significance and vitality of scientific debate across all disciplines. Far from being a weakness, this situation is quite fertile; it is the confrontation of hypotheses, approaches, and results of experiments and observations that leads to the advancement of scientific knowledge (Beitone et al., 2002, p. 10). Identifying gaps and accurately stating problems are crucial for any research project, especially in human and social fields.

In the human and social sciences, having a critical attitude towards previous studies is even more important than in physical and natural fields. This is because research results obtained in these fields are relative and subject to constant changes due to their complexity. Therefore, identifying research gaps is of utmost importance in the human and social sciences.

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There are several reasons why social researchers must identify research gaps. This process involves a shift in the researcher's relationship with the topic of study from seeking help to taking ownership. By doing so, researchers enhance their critical thinking skills and ability to identify imbalances, as well as theoretical and methodological deficiencies. Previous studies can then serve as a foundation for opening up new research horizons rather than simply repeating what has already been performed.

Identifying gaps is essential to social research as it helps researchers identify missing or ambiguous links. For instance, social research typically focuses on investigating factors that contribute to mental disorders, such as genetic, sociocultural, historical, political, and psychological factors. However, research gaps can occur for various reasons, ranging from inaccurate or partial information to biased evidence and unsuitable research methods (Robinson et al., 2011).

Robinson et al. (2011) define a research gap as arising when the ability of the systematic reviewer to draw conclusions is limited. Nevertheless, a research gap also serves as a starting point. While Robinson et al. (2011) emphasized that research gaps represent an output of literature reviews, Muller-Bloch and Kranz (2015) perceived them as an input, as they can motivate further research.

In conclusion, identifying research gaps allows researchers to avoid the lapses and mistakes of previous studies and contributes to the development and advancement of scientific knowledge. Reviewing previous scientific studies on the same research topic enables the researcher to identify different theories, questions, hypotheses, methods, techniques, populations, sample research, and results of previous studies. This leads to the following question: What role does the exploratory research step play in enabling the researcher to discover research gaps, and how can this be explored effectively to achieve this goal?.

5. Strategies for Uncovering Research Gaps in Social Sciences

5.1 The Power of the Preliminary Question

From an epistemological perspective, social scientific research involves

three major stages. Bachelard (1938), in his book "The Formation of the Scientific Mind," summarized the research path as follows: "The scientific fact is conquered, constructed, and confirmed. Conquered against prejudices, constructed by reason, and confirmed by facts."

Bourdieu, as a sociologist, adopted Bachelard's vision in his renowned book "The Craft of Sociology" (Bourdieu et al., 1991) when he described sociological research as a three-stage cognitive process. He emphasized the importance of respecting the logical sequence of these stages, referring to them as a hierarchy of cognitive processes or epistemological acts.

The first stage involves breaking away from preconceptions, general ideas, and the illusion of transparency. The second stage entails constructing the research topic through a scientific approach, specialized academic background, and theoretical frameworks. The third stage focuses on testing or experiencing a constructed research topic against reality.

However, research processes are complex and interdependent rather than strictly hierarchical (Grawitz, 2001, p. 546).

From a methodological standpoint, social research encompasses several detailed steps within or during these three major cognitive stages. Marquet et al. (2022), in their book "The Manual of Research in Social Sciences," propose a model that highlights the relationship between the major epistemological stages of sociological research and the methodological and detailed stages, as illustrated in the following chart (pp. 19-26):

1. The Rupture Stage: a. The initial question, b. Exploration, including literature review and interviews,
2. The Construct Stage: c. The problematic, d. The construction of the analytical model, which concerns the development of concepts and hypotheses
3. The Test Stage: e. Data collection, including methods and population, f. Data analysis, g. Conclusion.

Before starting a scientific research, it is crucial to formulate a preliminary question that defines what the researcher wants to know, discover, explain, or understand. This fundamental question is essential to limit the research topic, as many questions may arise when studying social phenomena. Specifying the goal is the first and most crucial step in any

research, and all subsequent investigation steps depend on this fundamental stage (Grawitz, 2001, p. 547).

The methodological value of the preliminary question is determined by the extent to which the researcher adheres to specific standards in its formulation (Marquet et al., 2022, pp. 31-41), such as:

- **Legibility:** The question should be accurate, clearly defined, and one-dimensional.
- **Feasibility:** The question should be within the researcher's competence, specialization, level, available time for social research, and accessible methods and techniques.
- **Relevance:** The question should be based on serious and factual grounds related to the study of what exists in reality, and should be an open question.

While these standards are crucial, they alone are insufficient. It is necessary to conduct a preliminary research process to transform the starting question into a research problem that is accurate, in-depth, rich, and theoretically well constructed, which is the purpose of exploratory research.

5.2 The Critical Role of Exploratory Research in Social Science

Kothari (2004, p. 26) stated that a preliminary study may not be necessary when research closely resembles prior work that has already been conducted. However, in new fields with limited well-developed techniques, a brief feasibility study is generally required.

Regardless of whether the topic is familiar or novel, the exploratory research stage is a critical component of the research process. This stage is crucial in achieving specific goals in methodology and understanding. The goals of exploratory research are as follows: Gaining theoretical and practical knowledge about the subject matter to identify the best possible methods of studying it scientifically. Overcoming subjectivity, biases, and the illusion of transparency. Shifting from observing social reality to constructing social reality based on scientific theories, concepts, and previous studies.

The exploratory research phase is essential in identifying research gaps and achieving the goals of research excellence and effectiveness. This

ensures that researchers are able to save time and effort, and complete the research with high quality within the specified deadlines.

Determining a specific time frame for completing the research transition stage is impossible. However, based on the various stages involved in social science research, it is commonly observed that the exploratory research stage usually takes up about 30% of the total research time. This can vary depending on the nature and objectives of the research, as well as the researcher's educational background or previous research experience.

the exploratory research stage plays a vital role in social science research by providing researchers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to identify research gaps, overcome biases, and construct a well-defined research problem. By dedicating sufficient time and effort to this stage, researchers can ensure the quality and effectiveness of their research while meeting the specified deadlines.

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6. Formulating Research Questions through Exploratory Inquiry

Theoretical exploration refers to researchers' work on a subject and primarily involves reading to highlight the objective content of selected works. However, it is also necessary to extract ideas that are most likely to facilitate the development of a reflection on the initial question (Lievre, 2016, p. 45).

Before diving into a theoretical exploration, it is essential to conduct preliminary readings to identify previous studies on the same topic. This includes looking into the problems, hypotheses, theories, methodological approaches, and results obtained by social science researchers on the same topics. Understanding what they have done, what they found, and how they approached it is crucial, as iterative research that fails to contribute to new knowledge loses both its theoretical and practical value.

Researchers cannot and should not try to read everything that others

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have written. Therefore, when selecting reference studies, books, and articles, specific criteria must be followed. These criteria include choosing sources closely related to the initial research question, prioritizing sources that provide valuable summaries, selecting analytical studies that help interpret the data, and choosing sources that offer different approaches to the topic. Additionally, sufficient time should be set aside for personal reflection, exchange of ideas, and discussion.

This type of exploratory and critical reading allows researchers to uncover areas of research that are unclear or controversial, both at the theoretical and methodological levels, as well as in other areas such as social, cultural, and environmental issues. Moreover, findings from studies in some societies may not necessarily apply to other social environments. For example, the latest adjustments to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, an international medical and psychological classification, triggered controversy in various scientific instances because some disorders, such as homosexuality, were removed despite the lack of conclusive studies on the validity of the classifications, which deeply affects the definition of normal and abnormal human behavior.

Reviewing the existing literature is a valuable source of inspiration for researchers (Angers, 1996). Webster and Watson (2002) emphasize that a key purpose of conducting a literature review is to pinpoint areas where further research is needed by exposing critical gaps in the existing knowledge base. A systematic review allows the researcher to step back and take stock of what is currently known and understood about a topic, as well as identify the boundaries of that knowledge. By systematically examining prior work, holes, inconsistencies, or contradictions in the literature may become apparent, representing opportunities for making new contributions to advance the field's understanding.

A well-executed literature review does more than simply restate what has been studied; it synthesizes past findings to generate new insights and uncover fertile areas for further inquiry and theory development. By crystallizing the current frontier of knowledge, an effective review sets the agenda for future work, motivating researchers to tackle open questions and

unexplored issues. In this way, the review cultivates a pipeline of new ideas and directions that can meaningfully extend the current state of the science.

Exploratory research plays a vital role in detecting research gaps by providing tools and strategies to identify areas requiring further investigation. Through critical reading, specific source selection criteria, and dedicated time for reflection and discussion, researchers can uncover gaps in the existing knowledge base and contribute to their field's advancement. As Robinson et al. (2011) point out, identifying research gaps where "the ability of the systematic reviewer to draw conclusions is limited" is a key output and purpose of conducting literature reviews.

Rather than being limitations, research gaps uncovered through a systematic literature review provide a vital starting point for further inquiry and theory development. They delineate the frontiers of current understanding and chart a course for future work to expand the field's boundaries (Müller-Bloch and Kranz, 2015). By exposing such gaps, effective reviews motivate and guide subsequent research aimed at enhancing our comprehension of the phenomena under investigation.

A research problem is a statement requiring resolution, representing an information gap that calls for action when examined. While research gaps can arise from literature syntheses (Robinson et al., 2011), they may also originate from other sources (Muller-Bloch and Kranz, 2015). The aim is not to rely on or repeat previous studies' criteria, but rather to choose the best theoretical, methodological, and field approaches on the same topic, potentially allowing the researcher to discover gaps. This involves using studies with high scientific value, relevance to specialization, modernity, plurality, diversity, and cross-disciplinary perspectives.

Formulating a problem statement involves addressing how to tackle a phenomenon in the face of previously structured and recognized issues. The problem in social research is a scientific, specialized, and founded discourse that is complex, coherent, and sequential. It positions the research topic within the context of development, accumulation, epistemic debate, and a changing, distinct, and complex societal reality within an appropriate theoretical paradigm.

To examine the research problem, four main questions help define it

more accurately: Why do we care about this topic? What do we aspire to achieve? What do we know so far? And what research question do we ask? (Angers, 1996). The researcher must carefully observe and assess the most prominent issues related to the topic, identify each issue's unique attributes, and compare them. This process involves extracting the dimensions, background, and theoretical frameworks of previous studies, potentially revealing unexplored dimensions or contradictions requiring further investigation. The researcher then chooses among the extracted and discovered problems that have a distinct and new question, giving their research contribution a unique character.

The importance of exploratory research cannot be overstated, as it forms the cornerstone of the research process. Neglecting to invest in the outcomes of theoretical and field exploration may have a deleterious effect on the quality and scientific value of the research. Without this stage, the research may merely duplicate existing findings, leading to "reinventing the wheel." This outcome can result in the research becoming a mere extension of mundane and everyday discourse and thinking, a prevalent issue in the social sciences due to the researcher's inherent involvement in or affiliation with the research subject or demographic. Insufficient theoretical development when formulating the research topic is another factor explaining why many researchers face difficulties in defining the problem according to research standards.

Specialized exploratory reading allows for the identification of multiple appropriate theoretical frameworks for the research. However, the theoretical value of research can be diminished, and its place within the context of ongoing knowledge accumulation can be lost when it lacks nuclear references and fundamental studies. This also leads to a significant loss of time and effort, whereas each new research project should be a new building block added to the blocks laid before.

It is necessary to point out the risk of methodological regression and the chaotic overlap of research stages, such as reviewing and modifying hypotheses and building concepts after the design stage or even after applying questionnaires. In such cases, the researcher may identify that the

questions or tools lack the necessary dimensions or indicators to test the relationships between study variables.

Furthermore, there is a strong correlation between the neglect of the exploratory research phase and the dissociation between the theoretical and applied dimensions in social research. It has become common to find a need for more use of theories, specialized concepts, and previous studies in many academic studies while analyzing data and interpreting results. This dissociation can lead to a lack of depth and context in the research findings, limiting their potential impact and contribution to the field.

To avoid these pitfalls, researchers must prioritize exploratory research and allocate sufficient time and resources to this critical phase. By systematically examining existing literature, engaging in theoretical and field exploration, and identifying appropriate frameworks, researchers can ensure that their work builds upon the foundation of previous studies and contributes meaningfully to the ongoing accumulation of knowledge in their field. This approach not only enhances the quality and scientific value of the research but also helps researchers navigate the complex landscape of social research with greater clarity and purpose.

7. Challenges in Identifying Research Gaps in the Social Sciences

Identifying research gaps in the social sciences is a crucial yet challenging task due to several obstacles related to both the researcher and the study itself. One of the primary hurdles is the sheer abundance of scientific knowledge and the vast number of published social studies at various levels, making it virtually impossible for researchers to review all previous studies. Despite the time and effort invested in collecting, reading, and comparing previous studies on a given topic, researchers cannot be certain that they have covered everything, or even the most significant studies, leaving the identification of research gaps unclear.

Language barriers pose another significant challenge for social researchers at Algerian universities. English, the dominant language in scientific production worldwide, is not as widely used among researchers in Algeria, who predominantly use Arabic and French. This linguistic divide makes it difficult for them to access the majority of studies that are only

available in English and have not been translated into these languages, further complicating the process of identifying research gaps.

The narrow specialization of researchers has also contributed to the fragmentation of social sciences. Research topics and problems in this field are often transdisciplinary, which complicates the identification of studies on the same topic. Additionally, academic studies are limited by time, and researchers are only partially dedicated to research. Discovering research gaps is only one stage of the research process, which reduces the possibility of identifying them effectively.

Identifying research gaps requires double the research effort and sacrificing time and rest, leading to the problem of weak motivation among an increasing percentage of researchers in social sciences. Furthermore, not all those affiliated with research in the social sciences have chosen this field out of strong self-conviction and desire. This lack of motivation and undervaluation of in-depth, innovative, and quality research may lead researchers to surrender to the prevailing trends in social research, exerting minimal effort.

there is a lack of methodological support for identifying research gaps. The main criticism of the scientific guidelines for identifying research gaps is that they may stifle creativity. However, as Cooper (1998, p. 184) notes, "rigorous criteria will not produce syntheses that are mechanical and uncreative" (Muller-Bloch and Kranz, 2015, p. 14). To overcome these obstacles, researchers must develop strategies to effectively navigate the vast landscape of scientific knowledge, bridge language barriers, and foster collaboration across disciplines. By addressing these challenges and providing adequate methodological support, the process of identifying research gaps in the social sciences can be made more efficient and effective, ultimately leading to more innovative and impactful research.

8. CONCLUSION

Identifying research gaps is a vital component of the social science research process, as it enables researchers to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of scientific knowledge and the resolution of complex human

and societal problems. By critically examining existing literature, engaging in exploratory research, and employing systematic strategies to uncover gaps in the current understanding, researchers can ensure that their work builds upon the foundation of previous studies and pushes the boundaries of their field.

However, the process of identifying research gaps in the social sciences is not without its challenges. The vast quantity of published studies, language barriers, narrow specialization, time constraints, and lack of motivation among researchers can all hinder the effective identification of research gaps. To overcome these obstacles, researchers must develop strategies to navigate the complex landscape of scientific knowledge, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and prioritize the allocation of time and resources to the exploratory research phase.

Ultimately, the quality and impact of social science research depend on the researcher's ability to identify and address critical research gaps. By investing in this process and adhering to rigorous methodological standards, researchers can ensure that their work contributes to the ongoing accumulation of knowledge and drives positive change in our communities. As the challenges facing our world become increasingly complex, the need for innovative, effective, and socially relevant research has never been greater. By prioritizing the identification of research gaps and striving for excellence in their work, social science researchers can play a vital role in shaping a better future for all.

9. Bibliography List :

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