DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH METHODS

Week 1, Lesson 3: The 'rigour' in Development Studies

Development Research Methods
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What we will cover in today's lecture

1. What is 'rigour' in Development Studies
2. Doing rigorous research in Development Studies
3. Assessing quality of Development Research

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Quality in Social Policy Research

Respondents classifying criteria as 'very important'
Top 5
1. The research is written in ways that are accessible to the appropriate audiences 82.9%.
2. The research design adopted clearly addresses the research question(s)- 82.5%.
3. The ways in which data were collected and analyzed are transparent -78.8%.
4. An explicit account of the research process and analysis of data is provided-76.5%.
5. The research makes a contribution to knowledge – 68.9%.
Bottom 5
30. The research is published in a prestigious refereed academic journal – 13.2%.
32. A randomized controlled design was used – 12.8%.
33. A publication deriving from the research is cited in prestigious refereed academic journals – 11.6%.
34. The research is published in a professional journal/magazine – 7.6%.
35. The research is published as a chapter in a book – 2.4%.

Source: Becker et al. (2006) cited in Sumner (2006)

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Judging quality and rigour

Traditional criteria	Alternative criteria
Validity: the extent to which there is a correspondence between data and conceptualization	**Credibility**: the extent to which a set of findings are believable
Reliability: the extent to which observations are consistent when instruments are administered on more than one occasion	**Transferability**: the extent to which a set of findings are relevant to settings other than the one or ones from which they are derived
Replicability: the extent to which it is possible to reproduce an investigation	**Dependability**: the extent to which a set of findings are likely to be relevant to a different time than the one in which it was conducted
Generalizability: the extent to which it is possible to generalize findings to similar cases which have not been studied	**Confirmability**: the extent to which the researcher has not allowed personal values to intrude to an excessive degree

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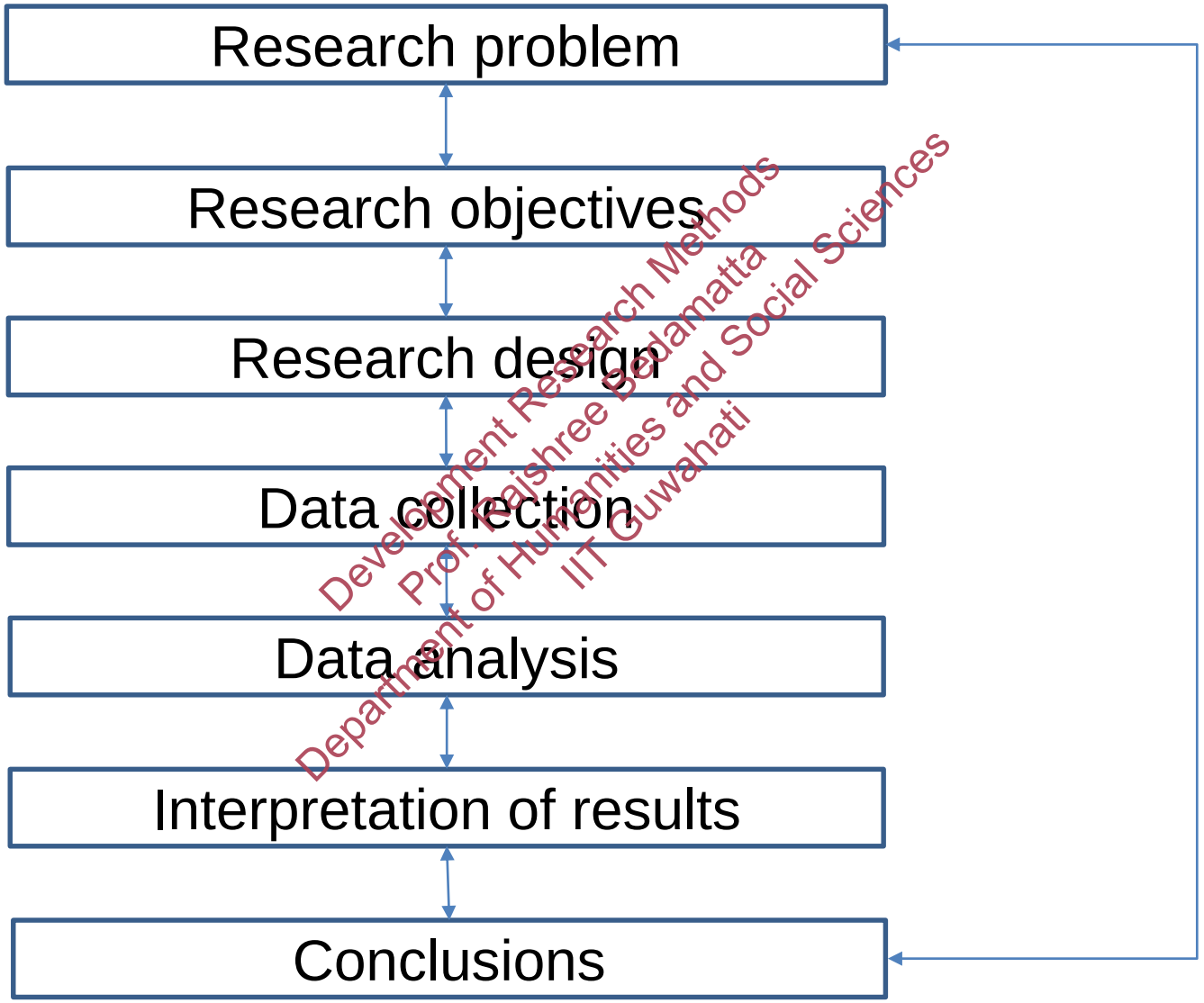
Source: Becker et al. (2006) cited in Sumner (2006)

Rigour is essentially about

- Taking a systematic approach.
  - A properly defined research problem.
  - The scope of the research questions is not so broad as to make meaningful research difficult.
  - Data collection is closely aligned with the research question.
  - Consistency in the analysis.
  - Transparent research process.

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Doing rigorous research in Development Studies



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Assessing quality of research

1. How credible are the findings?
2. How has knowledge or understanding been extended by the research?
3. How well does the evaluation address its original aims and purpose?
4. How well is the scope for drawing wider inference explained?
5. How clear is the basis of evaluative appraisal?
6. How defensible is the research design?
7. How well defended are the sample design/target selection of cases/documents?
8. How well is the eventual sample composition and coverage described?
9. How well was the data collection carried out?

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Assessing quality of research

10. How well has the approach to, and formulation of, analysis been conveyed?
11. How well are the contexts of data sources retained and portrayed?
12. How well has diversity of perspective and content been explored?
13. How well has detail, depth and complexity of the data been conveyed?
14. How clear are the links between data, interpretation and conclusions?
15. How clear and coherent is the reporting?
16. How clear are the assumptions/theoretical perspectives/values?
17. What evidence is there of attention to ethical issues?
18. How adequately has the research process been documented?

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Source: Spencer et al. (2003) cited in Sumner (2006)

Subjectivity and bias

- Acceptable and unacceptable bias
- Data mining
- Relation between data and research questions
- Understanding the data

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Possible Types of Bias in Development Studies Research

	Unintentional bias	Deliberate bias
Bias introduced by researcher	Personal values and positionality	Design of research- specification of research problem- Rejection of evidence
Bias introduced by the researched	Misreporting and imperfect recall	Responding on behalf of others
Bias introduced by the research process	Availability of accurate sample frame- Imperfect access to data	Interviewer influence

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Source: Sumner (2006)

Data mining

Data mining in primary methods	Data mining in secondary methods
Sample chosen to support the researcher's position	Data source is chosen to support the research question and hypotheses
Research instruments written to support the researcher's position	Data is rejected if they are inconsistent with the research questions and hypotheses
Data interpreted to support the researcher's position	Data cleaning – data unacceptable to the researcher's position are rejected

Source: Sumner (2006)

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Limitations of Development Studies Research

- Limitations in primary methods
- Secondary data bias
- Language and other barriers
- Policy agenda and Monopolization of knowledge

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References used for this lecture

- Andrew Sumner, “What is Development Studies?”, *Development in Practice*, Vol. 16, No. 6, 2006.
- Michael Edwards, “Development Practice and Development Studies: Working Together”, *Development in Practice*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1996.
- Andrew Sumner and Michael Tribe, International Development Studies: Theories and Methods in Research and Practice, 2008, Sage Publications.
- Vandana Desai and Robert B. Potter, *Doing Development Research*, 2006, Sage Publications.
- Becker, S., Bryman, A. and Sempik, J. (2006) Defining ‘Quality’ in Social Policy Research: Views, Perceptions and a Framework for Discussion. Suffolk, UK: Social Policy Association
- Patton, M. (2002) Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods. London: Sage.
- Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., Lewis, J. and Dillon, J. (2003) Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A Framework For Assessing Research Evidence. London: Government Chief Social Researcher’s Offi ce.

For a comprehensive literature on the topics covered in this lecture it is also suggested that students go through the reference list of the above cited papers.

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