

Increasing business students' Confidence in Questioning the Validity and Reliability of their Research

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Much student written work in business and management, whether for course work assignments or undergraduate and Masters dissertations, neglects to consider whether the data relied on as sources for the assessed work is academically rigorous, or indeed whether the assemblage created by the student will itself withstand rigorous scrutiny.

This paper categorises a number of different approaches in the literature to teaching business students about validity, reliability and how and where to generalise from their research. It distinguishes four categories in the business research methods literature, which are characterised as the positivist outlook, the phenomenological, the embedded, and the skills-type. Informed by these different ways of dealing with the subject, it describes three different approaches to teaching students how to assess the validity, reliability and extent to which data they have collected and things that they have read can be generalised.

Students tend to look at information in isolation. When required to search for or use information, students at both undergraduate and post-graduate level are no longer to be found in libraries surrounded by shelved books, but in pooled computer rooms, downloading information while exchanging messages with friends and playing the odd online game. The modern context of study and research thus exacerbates the problems many business and management students seem to have of thinking about information and linking it together. Students' ability to question what is being collected and read is impaired by this atomisation of information gathering, so that little attempt is made at linkage and synthesis during the information-gathering phase.

The aim of this ongoing research is to establish teaching methods, which enable business students to think about information within a context, assess the value of the information and to become critical independent learners.

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