Description

This was the fifth unit of the Research Methods and Professional Practice module. The goals of this unit were to understand the role of interviews and surveys in research and determine their relevance to your study, to be able to differentiate between surveys and questionnaires and understand their unique purposes, to learn how to design effective questionnaires to collect qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method data, to explore pre- and post-testing methods and their application in research and to be able to analyse data collected through interviews, surveys, and questionnaires effectively.

For this unit we were required to read an extract from chapter two in the book 'Projects in Computing and Information Systems: A Student's Guide' (Dawson, 2015), a paper on qualitative research (Hoepfl, 1997), a guide on using NVivo (Allsop et al., 2022) and an article on analysing qualitative data (Learning for Action, 2014). In addition to the required reading there was a lecture cast on questionnaire design.

There were two formative activities for this unit. The first formative activity was to reflect on the Cambridge Analytica scandal and provide two high profile examples of inappropriate use of surveys focusing on the social, legal and ethical concerns. The second formative activity was to critique a questionnaire. In addition to the two formative activities, we were asked to think about the data collection tool we intend to use in the module and in the dissertation module.

Feelings

When I was accessing the learning platform, I noticed one of the references in the lecture casts pointed to a broken link, there were some minor grammatical errors on the learning platform and not all the references in the reading list were correct (the references for the articles on Analysing Qualitative Data and comparing Surveys and questionnaires were both listed without a date when the publication date can be found in the source code). I would have expected the learning platform to be checked regularly to avoid these issues.

When I was doing the required reading for this module I felt as though it didn't seem entirely relevant as we are not expected to use NVivo in this module and the other articles were rather dated.

The workload for this unit was much more manageable compared to the previous units in the module up to this point as such it allowed me to spend more time catching up with the module whilst I continued working on PHD applications.

Evaluation

The aspects of the unit that I feel went well were; all objectives were achieved, my academic writing skills improved as a result of the formative activities and the workload was a lot more manageable with my other commitments.

The main area where I could have improved during this unit of the module was with my time management as I spent a lot of time working on the formative activities this

week so I didn't have as much time as I would have liked to spend catching up with the e-portfolio.

The only other negative I really had for this unit of the module was with the inconsistences on the learning platform. With the referencing format changing in 2025 but still accepting the current format for the next year this will most likely cause a great deal of confusion as there are multiple ways of referencing. In addition, the referencing on the learning platform not matching up with the current guidelines provided by the university raises even more potential questions on how to reference correctly.

Analysis

Reflecting on this unit, I recognise the overlap between the unit objectives and my academic and professional aspirations, as I begin preparation for PHD research. This unit provided insights into the differences between surveys and questionnaires and their respective purposes, along with guidance on designing effective data collection tools. The introduction of pre- and post-testing methods was especially beneficial, offering strategies to enhance the validity and reliability of research data. These skills are directly relevant to conducting primary research, which is a significant component of my future academic endeavours.

Despite these strengths, the learning experience was hindered by inconsistencies on the learning platform. Broken links, outdated references, and discrepancies in referencing formats required additional time and effort to address, which could have been spent on more meaningful engagement with the material. On a positive note, the workload for this unit was more manageable than in previous weeks, allowing me to focus on other responsibilities, including my PHD applications. However, my time management could have been better, as I spent a significant amount of time on the formative activities, leaving insufficient time to update my e-portfolio and fully consolidate my learning.

Conclusion

Overall, the unit successfully achieved its objectives and provided a solid foundation for conducting and evaluating research. It reinforced my academic writing and critical thinking skills, which are crucial for my PHD journey. However, my experience highlighted areas for improvement, such as the need for consistent and accurate learning materials and better personal time management. Despite these challenges, I feel more confident in my ability to design and critique research tools, which will serve me well in future research projects. This unit has been instrumental in bridging the gap between my current capabilities and the demands of a PHD.

Action Plan

Moving forward, I plan to focus on improving my time management skills to better balance module requirements with other responsibilities. To achieve this, I will allocate specific time slots for different tasks using a digital planner to visualize deadlines and prioritize effectively.

In terms of skill development, I aim to practice designing and critiquing research tools, such as surveys and questionnaires, beyond the scope of this module. Even though NVivo was not required for this unit, I plan to explore it further as familiarity with qualitative analysis software will be invaluable for my PHD research and dissertation. To enhance my academic writing, I will continue engaging in formative activities and seek feedback from peers or use tools like Grammarly to refine my work further. Lastly, I will integrate the skills learned in this unit into my ongoing PhD applications, emphasizing my ability to conduct ethical and effective research, while also exploring advanced research techniques to gain a competitive edge.

References

Gibbs, G. (1998) Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods. Further Education Unit. Oxford Polytechnic: Oxford.

Dawson, C. (2015) *Projects in Computing and Information Systems: A Student's Guide*. Harlow: Pearson.

Hoepfl, M. C. (1997) Choosing Qualitative Research: A Primer for Technology Education Researchers. *Journal of Technology Education* 9(1): 47-.

Allsop, D. B. et al. (2022) Qualitative Methods with Nvivo Software: A Practical Guide for Analyzing Qualitative Data. *Psych* 4(2): 142–159.

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