

University of Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana

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LESSON THREE :PILOT STUDIES

A **pilot study** is a small-scale trial run of the actual investigation – the investigation might be an experiment or any one of the other methods.

A pilot study may involve a handful of participants, rather than the total number, in order to ‘road-test’ the procedure and check the investigation runs smoothly.

It is also important to recognise that pilot studies are not just restricted to experimental studies. When using self-report methods, such as **questionnaires** or **interviews**, it is helpful to try out questions in advance and remove or reword those that are ambiguous or confusing.

In **observational studies**, a pilot study provides a way of checking coding systems before the real investigation is undertaken. This may be an important part of training observers.

In short then, a pilot study allows the researcher to identify any potential issues and to modify the design or procedure, saving time and money in the long run.

Some other things you should know

Single-blind procedure

Participants will sometimes *not* be told the aim of the research at the beginning of a study. As well as this, other details may be kept from participants, such as which condition of the experiment they are in or whether there is another condition at all.

This is known as a **single-blind procedure** and is an attempt to control for the confounding effects of **demand characteristics**.

Double-blind procedures

In a **double-blind procedure** neither the participants nor the researcher who conducts the study is aware of the **aims** of the investigation (often a third party conducts the investigation without knowing its main purpose).

Double-blind procedures are often an important feature of drug trials. Treatment

may be administered to patients by someone who is independent of the investigation and who does not know which drugs are real and which are **placebos** ('fake' drugs).

Control groups and conditions

In the example of the drug trial above, the group that receives the real drug is the **experimental group/condition** and the group that receives the placebo is the **control group/condition**.

We use the word 'control' in research to refer to the control of variables but we also use it to refer to setting a baseline. Control is used in many experimental studies for the purpose of *comparison*. If the change in behaviour of the experimental group is significantly greater than that of the control group, then the researcher can conclude that the cause of this effect was the **independent variable** (assuming all other possible **confounding variables** have remained constant).