Advanced Methods in Social Research

MA Social Research
Spring term
Department of Sociology
University of York

Module Leaders:
Paul Drew and Laurie Hanquinet
(Emails: paul.drew@york.ac.uk; laurie.hanquinet@york.ac.uk)
Advanced Research Methods in Social Sciences

Proposed Masters level module

Paul Drew & Laurie Hanquinet

This module aims to develop further the skills in research methods that students have acquired from the modules “Qualitative Methods” and “Quantitative methods & Data Analysis”. It will provide them training in more advanced research methods, both qualitative and quantitative. The four first sessions are used to introduce them to more advanced quantitative techniques that are often used in scientific articles, such as multinomial logistic regression and factor analysis (using SPSS). Specific attention will be also given to multiple correspondence analysis, given its increasing importance nowadays in social sciences (using SPAD). The last four sessions will focus on advanced qualitative methods. Two areas will be studied: 1) conversation analysis (in which York has an internationally recognised expertise) and 2) computer assisted qualitative data analysis.

Module aims

• To provide students with a wide range of more advanced methods, both quantitative and qualitative
• To provide students with practical-based knowledge of methods in social sciences
• To explore different quantitative and qualitative software packages
• To make students able to critically engage with more advanced methods

Module outcomes

By the end of this module students will:

• be able to carry out more advanced quantitative and qualitative methods
• be able to use more extensively SPSS
• be able to use SPAD to conduct multiple correspondence analysis
• to perform computer assisted qualitative data analysis
• be able to use software packages for qualitative data analysis such as Atlas Ti
• to have a comprehensive and in-depth knowledge of conversational analysis
• be able to understand scientific articles based on these more advanced techniques and to critically engage with them
• A wider understanding of the methodological possibilities and the issues around them
Indicative module content
(along with indicative key readings and student tasks)

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**Week 2. Multinomial logistic regression**

We examine how we might proceed if we have a dependent variable that has more than two answer categories (e.g. vote for political parties). Continuous variables are not used as dependents in logistic regression.


**Week 3. Factor analysis**

FA is a data reduction technique. It is used to unravel the latent structure (dimensions) of a set of variables by reducing a large number of variables to a smaller number of “factors”. These factors are often used as dependent variables in linear regressions.

**Week 4. MCA**

Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) is a statistical technique that allows the visualisation of complex data sets. It became known in sociology through the work of the late Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) as a means of mapping social spaces and fields (most famously in his book Distinction). The method is now becoming increasingly popular for types of ‘cultural mapping’ (for example, Bennett et al, Culture, Class Distinction) and continues to appeal to those with specific interests in Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology. However, the method is also widely used in a variety of disciplines, for instance in psychology and political science, and is also relatively easy to use through using the SPAD package.


**Weeks 5 and 6. Conversation Analysis**

In order to integrate this as far as possible with the quantitative focus of the first 4 weeks, and with the general aims of the course to advance students’ understanding of and ability in using social research methods, these sessions will develop students’ ability to apply CA to research in ‘practical’ settings – in the context of research that combines qualitative analysis with some degree of quantification.

We’ll use research into medical settings, and the project we conducted for the Department of Work & Pensions on interviews with claimants in Jobcentres, to illustrate and explore how CA can deliver distinctive and important findings about interactions in medical and social welfare settings. The sessions will include hands-on assignments involving the analysis of original data, which we will provide. We’ll explore why and how quantification has begun to play a significant part in CA research in such areas (despite the way in which CA has developed as a largely qualitative method). Some attention will be given not only to the practical settings in which research is conducted, but to the applied nature of some CA research – we’ll consider how CA enables us to investigate the relative effectiveness of communication, and to make recommendations concerning improvements.

**Indicative Reading:**


Research Report No. 633. This report can be downloaded from the DWP site http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp - then scroll down to report no. 633.


Weeks 8 and 9. Computer assisted qualitative data analysis

Atlas T/I and the analysis of interview data

In these sessions we will demonstrate how to use the computer software Atlas T/i, using samples of interview data collected as part of an interview research design. Students will also be encouraged to reflect on the merits and demerits of using computers to analyse qualitative data.

The general principles of CAQDAS will be introduced but the bulk of the sessions will be dedicated to a practical introduction to the use of one particular software package – Atlas.ti. Atlas is a computer programme that can help to organise data in order to facilitate a thematic analysis. So the use of Atlas should be understood in conjunction with thematic analysis. An introduction to CAQDAS can be found at caqdas.soc.surrey.ac.uk. Atlas.ti will be taught by way of supervised PC-lab based sessions. A study guide to Atlas.ti will be provided.

Sessions may include a researcher describing their recent experience of using Atlas, giving a real-world account of what it's really like to do this kind of research - rather than the air-brushed version to be found in a final report or journal article.

Indicative Reading


Assessment

The student will have to choose either a qualitative method or a quantitative one for their assessment.

Quantitative assessment: Students are required to write a report of 3,000 words using multinomial logistic regression, factor analysis combined with regression, or multiple correspondence analysis.