

Stats for Africa

Book review

Bless, C & Kathuria, R (1993) **Fundamentals of social statistics: An African Perspective**. Cape Town: Juta. 367 pages.

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There is little doubt that students and new research workers will find this book of great value. Bless and Kathuria have produced a very practical and down-to-earth introduction to social statistics which is likely to go a long way towards dispelling the negative attitudes and beliefs that many social science students bring to statistics courses.

Descriptive, propositional, and inferential statistics are presented in a systematic and "user-friendly" manner. The book is laced throughout with instructive illustrations and examples--which have been selected to reflect a particularly African perspective--and students are provided with numerous exercises that they can work through to test their understanding of the concepts dealt with.

An interesting feature of the text is the distinction made between "basic" and "more complex" knowledge of statistics; with more demanding sections being identified by asterisks in the text. This allows students who require only a basic knowledge of statistics to identify and to avoid material relating to theoretical explanations or complex methods which might not be appropriate to their needs. The text concludes with a useful introduction to time series analysis and a refreshingly critical, although somewhat brief, discussion of the uses (and abuses) of statistics.

Despite many refinements, I was somewhat disappointed to note that Bless and Kathuria continue to assume a readership which is equipped with the basic "pre-knowledge" (i.e., elementary arithmetic and algebraic skills, familiarity with graphical and tabular forms of representation, etc.) required to adequately engage with the topic. Although such an assumption might be valid in some quarters, it is an assumption which most certainly does not hold for an increasing number of underprepared students entering South African tertiary institutions. For such students task demands, such as for example basic numeracy, need to be directly addressed in the learning-teaching process to make it an effective and successful experience (Craig & Griesel, 1989).

Such attention to the task demands of statistics courses combined with an appreciation of the expectations, beliefs, and past learning experiences that underprepared students bring to the teaching-learning situation is, I believe, essential if we are to produce text books which reflects a truly "South African" (as opposed to "African") perspective.

REFERENCE.

Craig, A P & Griesel, H (1989) Pilot phase of the teach-test-teach research and educational development programme at the university of Natal. TTT Student Selection and Educational Research Programme, University of Natal, Durban.

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