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Formulating the Research Problem

L3 Research Methodology

Groups: 3/4/5

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What is a Research Problem?

The objective of a research is defined by the research problem. In any area of study (whether theoretical or practical), any question that needs to be answered or any assumption that needs to be challenged or investigated can be the basis for a research problem. The main function of the research problem is to indicate clearly **WHAT** is intended to be investigated.

Formulating a research problem is the first and the most important step in the research process because the type and the design of the research are greatly dependent upon it.

Selecting a Research Problem

It should be noted that not all questions and issues can be turned into researchable problems. A research should be significant in a way that it does not repeat a work that has already been done. This is why it is very important to review literature on the specific area you want to work on. In addition, it is important for a research problem to be formulated in terms of the procedures required to conduct the research.

Suppose a researcher wants to investigate the use of ICTs in classroom in a specific school, the methodology used to investigate such topic will differ if the researcher wants to investigate

- ▶ Teachers' attitudes towards the use of ICTs in class ➡ Descriptive qualitative research design
- ▶ The number of teachers using the ICTs ➡ Descriptive quantitative research design
- ▶ The effect of using the ICTs on students' performance ➡ Correlational quantitative research design

What do the following terms refer to

Qualitative research?

Quantitative research?

Correlational research?

Considerations in Selecting a Research Problem

Interest

Researching a topic that is in your scope of interest can help to keep you motivated and energized to keep going despite the time consumption and hard work necessary for conducting a research.

Relevance

The topic of research needs to be significant for you as a professional as well as for the field you are interested in. When selecting a topic, consider the fact that it needs to be relevant in terms of contributing to the existing body of knowledge and practice. It can generate new knowledge, test and validate already existing one, bridge gaps of information or change some practices.

Level of Expertise

It is necessary to have an adequate amount of knowledge and expertise in the field you are planning to select a research problem from. For instance, if a researcher is interested in neurolinguistics, they need to be acquainted with the field of linguistics and how it interacts with neuroscience, or at least they are willing to spend some time to do that before and while doing the research.

Precision

A research problem needs to be as precise as possible. The more the problem is narrowed down and restricted, the more detailed and structured your research will be.

Magnitude

When thinking about a topic to investigate, you need to make it manageable in terms of the available time and resources.

Measurements of concepts

In research, concepts used need to be clearly measured. For example, if a researcher wants to investigate the 'effectiveness' of a specific teaching approach, there should be clear indicators and measurements of the concept 'effectiveness'. In this case, students' grades can work as an indicator of the effectiveness of the teaching approach. This concept cannot be used without a clear type of measurement.

Availability of Data

Information and data collection is an important aspect to be considered when selecting a research problem. A researcher cannot embark on a research only to find out later that they are short on data and for some reason they cannot reach the information needed for the study.

Ethical issues

Ethics in research refers to a code of conduct that the researcher needs to consider. When working with participants, the researcher has to ensure the consent and the information confidentiality of the participants. They also need to be careful with asking the participants for sensitive information and to be aware of causing them harm in any possible way. Some ethical issues can be related to the way the researcher communicates their findings either through bias, incorrect reporting or inappropriate use of information. You need to foresee how ethical issues can affect the topic you want to choose and how to overcome these issues if there are any.

Sources of Research Problems

Kumar(2011)* identifies four Ps that can serve as sources for research problems in humanities :

- ▶ People
- ▶ Problems
- ▶ Programmes (interventions)
- ▶ Phenomena (relationships)

He suggests that each study may have a varying degree of focus on a specific 'P' . Some may have a combination of two or more.

Let's conceptualize the four Ps in terms of the educational field:

People can be students , teachers, parents ...etc.

Problems can be low grades, lack of motivation, difficulty in the performance of a specific skill ... etc.

Programmes can be any sort of classroom or extracurricular interventions such as teaching with ICTs, teacher-parent communication, using a new approach to teach a specific skill ... etc.

Phenomenon can be any relationship that results from the interaction of the different elements of the teaching/ learning environment such as the relationship between motivation and parental support or motivation and the use of ICTs ...etc.

*Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology: a Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*, 3ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), p45-47.

Steps in Formulating a Research Problem

- ▶ ***Identify a broad field or subject area of an interest to you***

If you feel like you are just not interested in any particular field. Take time to think about areas in your studies that you know well or might want to know. Try to think of something of use to you in the future or for your future career such as TEFL.

- ▶ ***Dissect the broad area into subareas***

List all the topics/ subtopics related to this field.

- ▶ ***From the list of these topics/subtopics, select the most interesting to you***

In your selection, bear in mind the considerations discussed formerly. Start with the interest factor. After eliminating all the topics which are of the least interest to you, move to other considerations such as the magnitude and the level of expertise.

- ▶ ***Raise research questions***

After selecting a subarea, think about the things you want to find out about this subarea. list as many questions as you can. Select the most interesting ones to you and apply the rest of the considerations.

Assignment

Copy and paste the graphic on the following slide.

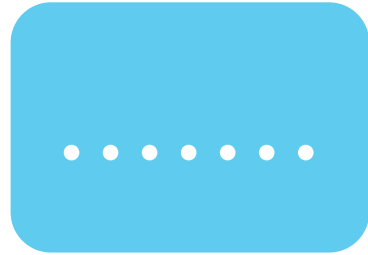
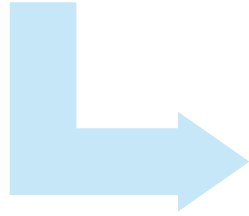
Follow the instructions and fill in the steps in order to get a researchable problem.

Send your work in a Word format to :

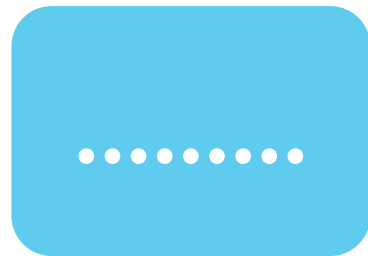
meriamghennai@gmail.com



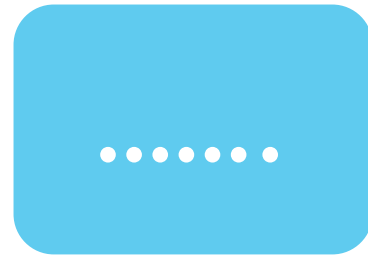
- Insert a broad field of interest to you within the scope of your studies.



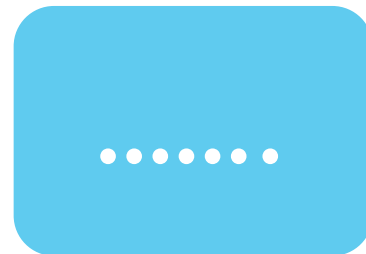
- List subareas related to this field.



- Select the most researchable subarea to you according to the considerations of selecting a research problem.



- Brainstorm questions you want to find out about this sub area.



- Select the most researchable question to you according to the considerations of selecting a research problem.

Name:

Group: