Lecture 1: What is Research?

Introduction

This lecture is intended to introduce students to the field of research, its importance in academia and people's life, how it is conceived by educationalists and experts, and how it has developed throughout the years. Many people have defined or described research and research methodology from different perspectives. Some of these definitions and portrays may give a clear picture of the whole course and its scope of interest.

1. 1 Definitions of Research

Walliman (2001), in defining research, highlights the idea that students at university should know well what the term "research" means, i.e. they should leave out any misunderstanding or confusion because the term is used in many fields. He states that research "is a term loosely used in everyday speech to describe a multitude of activities, such as collecting masses of information, delving into esoteric theories, and producing wonderful new products"(p. 6). So, Walliman tries to introduce the term "Research" as a concept from an academic point of view, distinguishing it from what it might have as meanings or

connotations in other domains and disciplines.

Hancock and Algozzine (2006) find that the core of research is "about answering questions as we attempt to understand the world around us!", and that in developing theses and dissertations "research involves systematic actions that help the researcher add credibility to the questions and answers engaged in his or her research" (p. 3). That is, we may all be considered as researchers owing to our search for answers and solutions; however, in academic circles research is more methodical, the fact that raises its reliability and validity.

Research methods and research procedures are then distinctive features of real research; they

require the researcher to put forward a research question, to prepare a specific design, to select an appropriate population and sample, and to verify the findings (ibid, p. 4).

Researchers are not concerned with research at the tertiary level merely for the sake of research. They are concerned with research as a necessary component in creating a tradition of performance in their context, one that is primarily based on improving faster and better problem-solving activities which, in their turn, increase the students' achievement and learning outcomes. This distinction can be clearly explained by the following definitions:

Booth et. all (2003, p. 10) say

"In the broadest terms, we do research whenever we gather information to answer a question

that solves a problem"

Bassey, M. (1998) defines research as "systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which

aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and wisdom"(Qtd in Costello, 2003,p. 3)

Singh (2006, p. 1) observes the following about research:

"Research simply seeks the answer of certain questions which have not been answered so far and the answers depend upon human efforts. It may be illustrated by taking an example of the moon. Some years ago man did not know what exactly the moon is? Was this problem which had no solution? Man could only make some assumptions about it but the man now this time by his efforts, he went to the moon brought the soil of the moon and studied it"

In **The Research Methods in Education Handbook for the Open University**

Masters Programme (n.d, p.6), "Research" is considered to be "used to cover a wide range of activities that differ substantially in all sorts of ways; and there is considerable disagreement about what should and should not count as research. At one extreme, the term covers forms of educational inquiry designed to contribute to disciplinary knowledge in, for example, the psychology or sociology of education. Equally, though, educational research may be primarily intended to inform policy making or practice, or it may take the form of inquiries carried out by policy makers, school managers, or teachers, in order to further their own activities".

1. 2 Objectives of Research

From a very broad perspective, research is used as the main tool in almost all fields to acquire knowledge. Research is used, for example, in many scientific fields such as psychology, biology, medicine, and physics where it has proved to make valuable contributions to what we already know about several things (Marczyk, DeMatteo & Festinger, 2005, p. 1). For novice researchers, according to Booth et. all (2003, pp. 4-5), it may provide the following immediate and practical benefits:

a. Learning to do research will help students to understand better the material they cover.

b. Doing research is an experience that enables students to evaluate carefully what they read through a process full of discoveries.

c. Writing the report of one's own work will help them to understand what is behind what they read as books and what other people (experts) tell through these books.

d. Research gives students insights into the nature of knowledge, i.e. the kind of knowledge which results from asking proper questions and offering pertinent answers.

e. Research offers students the opportunity to learn skills which they need now and in further studies. These skills are said to persist when students leave the university or institution they are studying or working in.

f. One more practical benefit of research is the pleasure it offers in solving puzzles and discovering things that other people do not know, and which contributes to the prosperity of human knowledge. Though there are benefits when doing research, there are times when

researchers undergo hardships. Therefore, they should keep in mind the hope that their research will bring some change to their life and the people they are living with and, meanwhile, these researchers should be ready to "undertake studies on topics that are not of their personal choosing, but because they pay the rent or may take them on to the next stage of their career" (Blaxter, Hughes & Malcolm, 2006, pp. 10-11). That is, doing research is not always personal, but it may be a kind of duty fulfillment.

1.3 Motivation in Research

The more students are motivated to learn, the more their academic achievement increases. Students' motivation can stem from external sources (extrinsic) such as expectations of parents, as it can stem from internal sources (intrinsic) such as the desire for academic recognition and status (Jordan, Carlile & Stack, p. 154). Intrinsic motivation has been considered to be more important than extrinsic motivation, for success, for example in learning, "will be more enhanced if the students come to love the learning process" (Harmer, p. 51). Therefore, students' commitment and perseverance in any task such as

research is already justified by their interest and need for gaining something. Motivation, and more specifically intrinsic motivation, is then an important factor that enables students to discover new things, to solve problems, to conduct projects, and to maintain information; that is, it is part and parcel of today's new learning requirements. Sprenger (2005) stated that: Intrinsic or internal motivation, as it is sometimes called, has to do with what people want to achieve without any intention to receive a reward from the others. The only reward that one needs is his or her success. "Research has found that when people are motivated by their own wants and needs they are almost always successful" (Brown, 2002, p. 20).

Moreover, according to Nesbit (Cited in, Burton, S. & Steane, P, 2004, p. 97), researchers Our classrooms must be student centered rather than teacher centered.

Discovery learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning, and inquiry learning have found their place in our schools. In order for any information to be stored in the brain, it must be received through sensory memory. It therefore behooves us to take into consideration attention,

motivation, learning styles, emotion, and meaning (pp. 8-9) should bear in mind that there are no strategies to follow so that they can motivate themselves and reach what they want, except for the efforts they make. Hence, motivation in research can be summarized by the following desires:

1. The desire to get academic recognition and status;

2. The desire to learn how to face difficulties and solve problems;

3. The desire to get a job or gain some respect in society;

4. The desire to conduct projects and serve people in a way or another.

1.4 Significance of Research

The significance of research lies in its main function which is" to improve research procedures through the refinement and extension of knowledge" (Singh, pp. 4-5). This latter is associated with many other aspects of social studies (ibid):

a. The function of research is to help making decisions concerning the refinement or

extension of knowledge in a particular area.

b. The function of research is to improve students' learning by solving classroom problems, i.e. helping teachers to implement more effective techniques.

c. Another function of research is to aid staff and administrators to improve the education systems. Research here contributes to facilitating the teaching learning process. Research is also very helpful in business and economy, for it provides information about needs and how to meet these needs. Many more matters in life require research; problems of industry, working conditions are all matters necessitating research (Kothari, 1990, pp. 5-6).