

## **Lecture 2: The Research Process**

### **Introduction**

Academics at all levels devote their time and efforts to research. Research takes place almost everywhere: "in laboratories and libraries, in jungles and ocean depths, in caves and in outer space. It stands behind every new technology, product, or scientific discovery-and most of the old ones"(Booth, Colomb & Williams, 2003, p.9)

### **2.1 How Social Research is done**

To conduct research is to inquire into some aspects of the world around us, and research as such is supposed to be very academic; i.e. it must be systematic, critical and scientific. Any work will have to meet some requirements to convince the public or readers (Swetnam, 2004, p. 1). Namely, the readers must find grounded recommendations and conclusions (ibid).

### **2.2 The Research Process**

Before tackling any problem, the social researcher faces a variety of choices of how to conduct his or her research. In fact, each choice or direction has advantages and disadvantages, that is, there is no right or wrong direction and it all depends on whether the selected approach fits the investigation and its purposes (Denscombe, 2007, p. 3). To ensure starting on a firm and solid path, there are some criteria and conditions to be taken into consideration. The social researcher must feel confident to answer "yes" to, at least, the following questions (ibid, p.5):

1. Does the research have significance in relation to some practical or theoretical issue?
2. Is there sufficient time for the design of the research, data collection and data analysis?
3. Will an adequate number and a suitable diversity of people, events, etc. be included?
4. Will the data be precise and detailed?
5. Can I avoid being biased because of my personal values, beliefs and background?
6. Can I avoid any deception or misrepresentation in my dealings with the research subjects?

### **2.3 Criteria of Good Research**

According to Kothari (1990, p. 20), good research is one that is systematic (it rejects guessing and intuition), logical (it is characterized by logical reasoning), empirical (it relies on concrete data), and replicable (its results can be verified by other researchers). Sometimes, it is worth assessing the reliability, the validity, and the generalizability of the research to answer the question "Is it a good research?" (Swetnam, 2004, p. 23). If it is reliable, the same procedures or actions would lead to the same results; if it is valid, the researcher is observing or measuring the right phenomenon; and if it is generalizable, the work is useful to other people or situations. Checking the above criteria is also required to maintain academic integrity.

## **2.4 Problems often Encountered by our Students**

### **2.4.1 Choice of a Topic**

Choosing one's research topic is perhaps the main single decision that a researcher is supposed to take. It requires some focus on one's interests, professional and future life, and on the objectives of this piece of research, and what the latter might bring to the researcher's institution or workplace (Blaxter, Hughes & Malcolm, 2006, p. 22). Then, what must be mentioned here is that after having read enough literature, and in order to conduct research, students "need to start by identifying a question which demands an answer, or a need which requires a resolution, or a riddle which seeks a solution, which can be developed into a

research problem: the heart of the research project"(Walliman, 2001, p. 20). That is, there must be a clear and suitable problem to address. Suitability is meant to indicate that the problem is interesting and significant (ibid, p. 21).

### **2.4.2 The Literature Review and its Importance**

Literature reviews are distinctive features of research and are conducted in many different ways. All of these are characterized by the incorporation of more interaction with material through critical evaluation (Finn, 2005, pp.89-90). The aim and importance of a literature review derive from the need to understand and justify a research question in a given research area, but not to just summarize concepts, theories, applications and the like (ibid, p. 90). When students carry out a literature review, they aim to find out the people speaking about what they are interested in, specifically their research objectives, and to show their supervisors that they have read in depth about their topics (Biggam, 2008, p. 50).

### **2.4.3 Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

It is very crucial and very strategic for beginning researchers to understand the differences between qualitative and quantitative research because the selection of an appropriate approach depends mainly on the goals and preferences of the researcher (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 7). If the researcher wants to describe the state of affairs from a distance, then the qualitative approach seems to be the best choice, and if he seeks to discover relations between variables, the quantitative will be more fitting. This is only because "Qualitative research approaches collect data through observations, interviews, and document analysis and summarize the findings through narrative or verbal means" (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2006, p. 15); whereas, "All quantitative research approaches summarize results numerically" (ibid, p. 12) with some differences in the goals and the ways they collect data.