
Chapter II The Research Problem

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.

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 working in. 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

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.

Sources of Research Problems

Kumar(2011)¹ 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.

¹ *Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology: a Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*, 3ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), p45-47

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.