

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Lecture one :

Research is undertaken within most professions. More than a set of skills, it is a way of thinking: examining critically the various aspects of your professional work. It is a habit of questioning what you do, and a systematic examination of the observed information to find answers with a view to instituting appropriate changes for a more effective professional service.

DEFINITION OF RESEARCH

When you say that you are undertaking a research study to find answers to a question, you are implying that the process;

1. is being undertaken within a framework of a set of philosophies (approaches);
2. uses procedures, methods and techniques that have been tested for their validity and reliability;
3. is designed to be objective .

Philosophies means approaches e.g. qualitative, quantitative and the academic discipline in which you have been trained.

Validity means that correct procedures have been applied to find answers to a question. *Reliability* refers to the quality of a measurement procedure that provides repeatability and accuracy.

objective means that you have taken each step in an unbiased manner and drawn each conclusion to the best of your ability and without introducing your own vested interest. Adherence to the three criteria mentioned above enables the process to be called 'research'.

However, the degree to which these criteria are expected to be fulfilled varies from discipline to discipline and so the meaning of 'research' differs from one academic discipline to another. The difference between research and non-research activity is, in the way we find answers: the process must *meet certain requirements to be called research*. We can identify these requirements by examining some definitions of research.

The word research is composed of two syllables, *re* and *search*. *re* is a prefix meaning again, anew or over again *search* is a verb meaning to examine closely and carefully, to test and try, or to probe.

Together they form a noun *describing a careful, systematic, patient study and investigation in some field of knowledge, undertaken to establish facts or principles*. Research is a *structured enquiry that utilizes acceptable scientific methodology to solve problems and create new knowledge that is generally applicable*. Scientific methods consist of systematic observation, classification and interpretation of data.

Although we engage in such process in our daily life, the difference between our casual day- to-day generalisation and the conclusions usually recognized as scientific method lies in the degree of formality, rigorousness, verifiability and general validity of latter.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESEARCH:

Research is a process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting information to answer questions.

But to qualify as research, the process must have certain characteristics: it must, as far as possible, be controlled, rigorous, systematic, valid and verifiable, empirical and critical.

-Controlled- in real life there are many factors that affect an outcome. The concept of control implies that, in exploring causality in relation to two variables (factors), you set up your study in a way that minimizes the effects of other factors affecting the relationship.

This can be achieved to a large extent in the physical sciences (cooking, baking), as most of the research is done in a laboratory. However, in the social sciences (Hospitality and Tourism) it is extremely difficult as research is carried out on issues related to human beings living in society, where such controls are not possible. Therefore in Hospitality and Tourism, as you cannot control external factors, you attempt to quantify their impact.

-Rigorous- you must be scrupulous in ensuring that the procedures followed to find answers to questions are *relevant, appropriate and justified*. Again, the degree of rigor varies markedly between the physical and social sciences and within the social sciences.

-Systematic-this implies that the procedure adopted to undertake an investigation follow a certain logical sequence. The different steps cannot be taken in a haphazard way. Some procedures must follow others.

-Valid and verifiable-this concept implies that whatever you conclude on the basis of your findings is correct and can be verified by you and others.

-Empirical-this means that any conclusion drawn are based upon hard evidence gathered from information collected from real life experiences or observations.

-Critical-critical scrutiny of the procedures used and the methods employed is crucial to a research enquiry. The process of investigation must be foolproof and free from drawbacks. The process adopted and the procedures used must be able to withstand critical scrutiny.

For a process to be called research, it is imperative that it has the above characteristics.

OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

The purpose of research is to discover answers to questions through the application of scientific procedures. The main aim of research is to find out the truth which is hidden and which has not been discovered as yet. Though each research study has its own specific purpose, we may think of research objectives as falling into a number of following broad groupings:

1. To gain familiarity with a phenomenon or to achieve new insights into it (studies with this object in view are termed as *exploratory* or *formulative* research studies);
2. To portray accurately the characteristics of a particular individual, situation or a group (studies with this object in view are known as *descriptive* research studies);
3. To determine the frequency with which something occurs or with which it is associated with something else (studies with this object in view are known as *diagnostic* research studies);
4. To test a hypothesis of a causal relationship between variables (such studies are known as *hypothesis-testing* research studies).

MOTIVATION IN RESEARCH

What makes people to undertake research? This is a question of fundamental importance. The possible motives for doing research may be either one or more of the following:

1. Desire to get a research degree along with its consequential benefits;
2. Desire to face the challenge in solving the unsolved problems, i.e., concern over practical problems initiates research;
3. Desire to get intellectual joy of doing some creative work;
4. Desire to be of service to society;
5. Desire to get respectability.

However, this is not an exhaustive list of factors motivating people to undertake research studies. Many more factors such as directives of government, employment conditions, curiosity about new things, desire to understand causal relationships, social thinking and awakening, and the like may as well motivate (or at times compel) people to perform research operations.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD RESEARCHERS

According to Dörnyei (2007: 17-18), the characteristics of good researchers are:

- The primary characteristic of good researchers is that they have a genuine and strong **curiosity** about their topic. They are always after something intriguing or puzzling or about which they have a hunch (in research terms, a hypothesis). Serious research will inevitably require some hard work and the only way to maintain our momentum and creativity throughout the laborious parts is to be driven by our passion for the topic. It is why it is advisable for novice researchers to choose topics that they are genuinely interested in rather than one that seems sensible from a career point of view.
- The second reason is **common sense**.
- The third aspect of successful research is **having good ideas**. Many of the best known studies in applied linguistics are not at all complicated in terms of their research methodology but they are based on fairly simple but original insights.

- Finally, a good researcher needs to be **disciplined and responsible**. This is related to the systematic nature of research. During the course of investigation, there are recurring temptations to cut corners, to leave out some necessary steps and to draw conclusions that are not fully supported by the data. It is the researcher's discipline that keeps him/her on the right track. The lack of discipline or consistency is one of the frequent sources of inadequate research.
- An important related characteristic is that a good researcher should have a sense of social responsibility; that is, accountability to the field and more broadly to the world. This means that a good researcher needs to learn to communicate his/her findings with others.
- Other characteristics can be: commitment, having good written and verbal communication skills, having an analytical mind...