**UNIVERSITY OF M’SILA FIRST YEAR LEVEL**

**LETTERS AND LANGUAGES FACULTY MODULE: RESEARCH METHODLOGY**

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERATURE DEPARTMENT MODULE LECTURER: FARRAH. S.**

**Lesson two: Inquiry Mode:**

From the process adopted to find answer to research questions – the two approaches are:

*- Structured approach*

*- Unstructured approach*

1. ***Structured approach:***

The structured approach to inquiry is usually classified as *quantitative research.* Here everything that forms the research process- objectives, design, sample, and thequestions that you plan to ask of respondents- is predetermined.

It is more appropriate to determine the *extent* of a problem, issue or phenomenon by quantifying the variation. e.g. how many people have a particular problem? How many people hold a particular

attitude?

1. ***Unstructured approach:***

The unstructured approach to inquiry is usually classified as *qualitative research.* This approach allows flexibility in all aspects of the research process.It is more appropriate to explore the *nature* of a problem, issue or phenomenon *without quantifying it.*

Main objective is to describe the *variation* in a phenomenon, situation or attitude. e,g, description of an observed situation, the historical enumeration of events, an account of different opinions different people have about an issue, description of working condition in a particular industry.

*Both approaches have their place in research. Both have their strengths and weaknesses.*

*In many studies you have to combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches.*

For example, suppose you have to find the types of cuisine / accommodation available in a city and the extent of their popularity.

*Types of cuisine* is the qualitative aspect of the study as finding out about them entails description of the culture and cuisine. The *extent of their popularity* is the quantitative aspect as it involves estimating the number of people who visit restaurant serving such cuisine and calculating the other indicators that reflect the extent of popularity.

**THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

The research process is similar to undertaking a journey.

For a research journey there are two important decisions to make-

1) *What you want to find out about* or what research questions (problems) you want to find answers to;

2) *How to go about finding their answers.*

There are practical steps through which you must pass in your research journey in order to find answers to your research questions.

The path to finding answers to your research questions constitutes *research methodology.*

At each operational step in the research process you are required to choose from a multiplicity of *methods, procedures and models* of research methodology which will help you to best achieve your objectives.

*This is where your knowledge base of research methodology plays a crucial role.*

***Steps in Research Process:***

1. Formulating the Research Problem

2. Extensive Literature Review

3. Developing the objectives

4. Preparing the Research Design including Sample Design

5. Collecting the Data

6. Analysis of Data

7. Generalisation and Interpretation

8. Preparation of the Report or Presentation of Results-Formal write ups of conclusions reached.

***Step1. Formulating the research problem:***

It is the first and *most crucial step* in the research process

- Main function is to decide *what* you want to find out *about.*

- The way you formulate a problem determines almost every step that follows.

Sources of research problems

Research in social sciences revolves around four Ps:

• People- a group of individuals

• Problems- examine the existence of certain issues or problems relating to their lives; to ascertain attitude of a group of people towards an issue

• Programs- to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention

• Phenomena- to establish the existence of a regularity.

In practice most research studies are based upon at least a combination of two *Ps.*

***Every research study has two aspects:***

**1.** **Study population**-

• People: individuals, organizations, groups, communities

( *they provide you with the information or you collect information about them)*

**2. Subject area-**

• Problems: issues, situations, associations, needs, profiles

• Program : content, structure, outcomes, attributes, satisfactions, consumers, Service providers, etc.

• Phenomenon: cause-and-effect relationships, the study of a phenomenon

Itself (*Information that you need to collect to find answers to your research questions)*

*You can examine the professional field of your choice in the context of the four Ps in order to identify anything that looks interesting.*

**Considerations in selecting a research problem**:

These help to ensure that your study will remain manageable and that you will remain motivated.

1. **Interest**: a research endeavour is usually time consuming, and involves hard work and possibly unforeseen problems. One should select topic of great interest to sustain the required motivation.

2. **Magnitude:** It is extremely important to select a topic that you can manage within the time and resources at your disposal. Narrow the topic down to something manageable, specific and clear.

3. **Measurement of concepts**: Make sure that you are clear about the indicators and measurement of concepts (if used) in your study.

4. **Level of expertise**: Make sure that you have adequate level of expertise for the task you are proposing since you need to do the work yourself.

5. **Relevance**: Ensure that your study adds to the existing body of knowledge, bridges current gaps and is useful in policy formulation. This will help you to sustain interest in the study.

6. **Availability of data**: Before finalizing the topic, make sure that data are available.

7. **Ethical issues**: How ethical issues can affect the study population and how ethical problems can be overcome should be thoroughly examined at the problem formulating stage.

**Steps in formulation of a research problem** :

Working through these steps presupposes a reasonable level of knowledge in the broad subject area within which the study is to be undertaken. Without such knowledge it is difficult to clearly and adequately ‘dissect’ a subject area.

**Step 1** Identify a broad field or subject area of *interest* to you.

**Step 2** *Dissect* the broad area into sub areas.

**Step 3** *Select* what is of most interest to you.

**Step 4** Raise research questions.

**Step 5** Formulate objectives.

**Step 6** Assess your objectives.

**Step 7** Double check.

So far we have focused on the basis of your study, *the research problem.* But every study in social sciences has a second element, *the study population* from whom the required information to find answers to your research questions is obtained.

As you narrow the research problem, similarly you need to decide very specifically who constitutes your study population, in order to select the appropriate respondents.

**Step 2. Reviewing the literature**:

-Essential preliminary task in order to acquaint yourself with the available *body of knowledge* in your area of interest.

-Literature review is integral part of entire research process and makes valuable contribution to every operational step.

-Reviewing literature can be time-consuming, daunting and frustrating, but is also rewarding. Its functions are:

a. Bring clarity and focus to your research problem;

b. Improve your methodology;

c. Broaden your knowledge;

d. Contextualise your findings.

**a. Bring clarity and focus to your research problem**;

The process of reviewing the literature helps you to understand the subject area better andthus helps you to conceptualise your research problem clearly and precisely. It also helps you to understand the relationship between your research problem and the body of knowledge in the area.

**b. Improve your methodology**:

A literature review tells you if others have used procedures and methods similar to the ones that you are proposing, which procedures and methods have worked well for them, and what problems they have faced with them. Thus you will be better positioned to select a methodology that is capable of providing valid answer to your research questions.

**c. Broaden your knowledge base in your research area**:

It ensures you to read widely around the subject area in which you intend to conduct your research study. As you are expected to be an expert in your area of study, it helps fulfil this expectation. It also helps you to understand how the findings of your study fit into the existing body of knowledge.

**d..Contextualise your findings**:

How do answers to your research questions compare with what others have found? What contribution have you been able to make in to the existing body of knowledge? How are your findings different from those of others? For you to be able to answer these questions, you need to go back to your literature review. It is important to place your findings in the context of what is already known in your field of enquiry.