

Lecture III: Finding and Identifying a Research Problem for your Proposal

The old cliché that a problem well stated is half solved applies perfectly to educational research. In research process, the first and foremost step happens to be that of selecting and properly defining a research problem.

A researcher must find the problem and formulate it so that it becomes susceptible to research. Like a medical doctor, a researcher must examine all the symptoms (presented to him or observed by him) concerning a problem before he can diagnose correctly.

To define a problem correctly, a researcher must know: what a problem is?

A research problem, in general, refers to some difficulty which a researcher experiences in the context of either a theoretical or practical situation and wants to obtain a solution for the same.

When deciding on a topic, there are few steps you will need to do:

Brainstorm for ideas: Choose a topic that you are interested in. The research process is more relevant if you care about your topic.

Read General Background Information: Reading broad summaries allows you to get an overview of the topic/topics you are interested in and check how your idea relates to broader, narrower, and related issues.

Narrow Down Your Topic: A broad, general topic makes it difficult to find specified research, so narrowing down the topic is needed. There are different ways to narrow down your topic:

- Time frame
- Geographical area
- Population group
- Discipline

Make a List of Keywords: Keep track of the words that are used to describe your topic:

- Look for words that best describe your topic
- Find broader and narrower terms, synonyms, key concepts for key words to widen your search capabilities

- Make note of those words and use them later when searching database and catalogues

At this point, it is common to modify your topic as you may find too much and need to narrow your focus, or find too little and need to broaden it.

➤ **Research Problem**

A research problem is a statement about an area of concern, a condition to be improved, a difficulty to be eliminated, or a troubling question that exists in scholarly literature, in theory, or in practice that points to the need for meaningful understanding and deliberate investigation.

In some social science disciplines the research problem is typically posed in the form of a question. There are two types of research problem: those which relate to the state of nature and those which relate to relationship between variables.

➤ **Sources for Research Problem**

Selecting a suitable research topic is not easy. The following are the main sources to which one may proceed for a suitable research problem:

Personal Experience: Your everyday experiences can give rise to worthwhile problems for investigation. Think critically about your own experiences and/or frustrations with an issue facing society, your community, or in your neighborhood. This can be derived, for example, from deliberate observations of certain relationships for which there is no clear explanation or witnessing an event that appears harmful to a person or group or that is out of the ordinary.

Relevant Literature: The selection of a research problem can often be derived from an extensive and thorough review of pertinent research associated with your overall area of interest. This may reveal where gaps remain in our understanding of a topic.

Consult supervisor or experts: They might suggest more significant problem of the area and can discuss certain issues of the area to emerge a problem.

Further research and recommendation in other's previous research: It is a general practice that researchers suggest some problems in their research reports. The researcher can pick the suitable research problem for his/her own study.

➤ **Criteria for Selecting a Problem**

There are several factors to be considered in undertaking research. These factors are:

- ***The topic is interesting*** It will hold the researcher's interest through the entire research.
- ***The topic is researchable*** It can be investigated through the collection and analysis of data and it is not stated as a topic seeking to determine what should be done.
- ***The topic is significant*** It contributes in some way to the improvement or understanding of education theory or practice.
- ***The topic is manageable*** If it fits the researcher's level or research skills, needed resources, and time restrictions.