





# Research Methodology S3 / Chapter 2: The Research Problem

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## Caption

-  Glossary entry
-  Abbreviation
-  Bibliographical reference
-  General reference

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# Objectives



By the end of this chapter, learners will be able to:

- *Understand* the nature of research problem in the field of humanities and social sciences.
- *Recognize* different sources of research problems in their field.
- *Analyse* different aspects pertaining to their field for potential research problems.
- *Formulate* a preliminary research problem.

# The Research Problem

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Defining the Research Problem                  | 5 |
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## 1. Defining the Research Problem

The objective of a research is defined by 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 investigated.

## 2. Considerations in Selecting a Research Problem

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Interest   | 5 |
| Relevance  | 5 |
| Level of Expertise   | 6 |
| Precision  | 6 |
| Magnitude  | 6 |
| Measurement of Concepts                                    | 6 |
| Availability of Data                                       | 6 |
| Exercise : Task 1: Characteristics of the research problem | 7 |

### 2.1. 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.

### 2.2. 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.

## 2.3. Level of Expertise

It is necessary to have an adequate amount of knowledge and expertise in the field you are planning to select a research problem from. 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.

## 2.4. 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.

## 2.5. Magnitude

When thinking about a topic to investigate, you need to make it manageable in terms of the available time and resources.

## 2.6. Measurement 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.

## 2.7. Availability of Data

Information and 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.

## 2.8. Exercice : Task 1: Characteristics of the research problem

[solution n°1 p.20]

### 2.8.1. Exercice

Which of the following represents a good choice for a research problem.

- A general research topic.
- A precise research topic.
- A topic that is manageable in terms of time and resources.
- A topic that is a part of the researchers specialty and interests.
- A topic that is already investigated by other researchers in the field.

## 3. Sources of Research Problems

Sources of Research Problems

7

Exercice : Task2: Sources of research problems in English studies

8

### 3.1. Sources of Research Problems

Kumar(2011)<sup>p.24</sup> identifies four Ps <sup>p.23</sup> 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.



#### Example

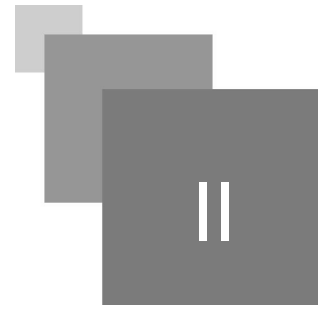
Let's conceptualize the four Ps <sup>p.23</sup> in terms of the educational field:

- People can be students , teachers, parents ...etc.
- 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.
- Phenomena 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





# Formulating a Research Problem in English Studies



Consult: *Buckingham, L. (2016). Doing a Research Project in English Studies: a Guide for Students. Routledge. P 5-10*

# Written Assignment



## Formulating a Preliminary Research Problem

---

1. Write down a general topic that could be of an interest to you as a researcher.
2. Mention why you are interested in such a topic.
3. Narrow down the topic by adding more precise information in order to have a research problem with a specific focus.  
P.S. the topics chosen need to pertain to the field of English language studies.
4. Send your assignment to: *meriamghennai@gmail.com*

# Test 2



Exercice

---

*[solution n°4 p.20]*



## 0. Exercice : Statement 1

The research problem represents the WHAT of the research.

- True
- False

## 0. Exercice : Statement 2

The research problem indicates how the research is conducted.

- True
- False

## 0. Exercice : Statement 3

The research problem can be an assumption that needs to be investigated.

- True
- False

## 0. Exercice : Statement 4

Selecting a general topic as a research problem indicates the level of expertise of the researcher his/her mastery of the topic.

- True
- False

## 0. Exercice : Statement 5

The magnitude of the selected research problem needs to be in accordance with the time allotted for conducting the research.

- True
- False



## 0. Exercice : Statement 6

Factors influencing the availability of data and the process of its collection need to be considered when selecting a research problem.

- True
- False

## 0. Exercice : What is the source of the following research topic problem (1)?

Investigating teacher-student interaction outside the classroom.

- People
- Problems
- Phenomena
- Programs

## 0. Exercice : What is the source of the following research topic problem (2)?

Investigating the use of social media to enhance student-teacher interaction.

- People
- Problems
- Phenomena
- Programs

# Exercises solution



## > Solution n° 1

Exercise p. 7

Exercise

Which of the following represents a good choice for a research problem.

- A general research topic.
- A precise research topic.
- A topic that is manageable in terms of time and resources.
- A topic that is a part of the researchers specialty and interests.
- A topic that is already investigated by other researchers in the field.

## > Solution n° 2

Exercise p. 8

What is the focus of the following research topics?

| People   | Problems   | Phenomenon  | Programs  |
|--|--|---|---|
| Investigating teacher-student interaction outside the classroom. | Investigating speaking anxiety in Oral Expression classes. | Investigating the effects of stress on students academic achievement. | Investigating the use of social media to enhance student-teacher interaction. |

## > Solution n° 3

Exercise p. 11

Exercise : Statement 1

The research problem represents the WHAT of the research.

- True

False

Exercise : Statement 2

The research problem indicates how the research is conducted.

True

False

Exercise : Statement 3

The research problem can be an assumption that needs to be investigated.

True

False

Exercise : Statement 4

Selecting a general topic as a research problem indicates the level of expertise of the researcher and his/her mastery of the topic.

True

False

Exercise : Statement 5

The magnitude of the selected research problem needs to be in accordance with the time allotted for conducting the research.

True

False

Exercise : Statement 6

Factors influencing the availability of data and the process of its collection need to be considered while selecting a research problem.

True

False

Exercise : What is the source of the following research topic problem (1)?

Investigating teacher-student interaction outside the classroom.

People

Problems

- Phenomena
- Programs

Exercice : What is the source of the following research topic problem (2)?

Investigating the use of social media to enhance student-teacher interaction.

- People
- Problems
- Phenomena
- Programs

# Abbreviation



**Four Ps:** People- problems- programmes- phenomena



# References



(Kumar, 2011, p. 45-47)

Reference



# Bibliography



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Kumar, R. (2011) *Research Methodology: a Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners (3d Ed.)*. Sage  
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