



Module: English

Branch: Finance and International Trade

Level: Third year Bachelor

Lecture 01: The Research Problem

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/she can diagnose correctly. To define a problem correctly, a researcher must know: what a problem is?

1- Research Problem Definition

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.

We can state the components¹ of a research problem as under:

- (i) There must be an individual or a group which has some difficulty or the problem.
- (ii) There must be some objective(s) to be attained at. If one wants nothing, one cannot have a problem.
- (iii) There must be alternative means (or the courses of action) for obtaining the objective(s) one wishes to attain. This means that there must be *at least two means* available to a researcher for if he has no choice of means, he cannot have a problem.
- (iv) There must remain some doubt in the mind of a researcher with regard to the selection of alternatives. This means that research must answer the question concerning the relative efficiency of the possible alternatives.
- (v) There must be some environment(s) to which the difficulty pertains.

Thus, a research problem is one which requires a researcher to find out the best solution for the given problem, i.e., to find out by which course of action the objective can be attained optimally in the context of a given environment. There are several factors which may result in making the problem complicated. For instance, the environment may change affecting the efficiencies of the courses of action or the values of the outcomes; the number of alternative courses of action may be very large; persons not involved in making the decision may be affected by it and react to it favourably or unfavourably, and similar other factors. All such elements (or at least the important ones) may be thought of in context of a research problem.

2- Selecting the Problem

The research problem undertaken for study must be carefully selected. The task is a difficult one, although it may not appear to be so. Help may be taken from a research guide in this connection.

A problem must spring from the researcher's mind like a plant springing from its own seed. If our eyes need glasses, it is not the optician alone who decides about the number of the lens we require. We have to see ourselves and enable him to prescribe for us the right number by cooperating with him. Thus, a research guide can at the most only help a researcher choose a subject. However, the following points may be observed by a researcher in selecting a research problem or a subject for research:

- Subject which is overdone should not be normally chosen, for it will be a difficult task to throw any new light in such a case.
- Controversial subject should not become the choice of an average researcher.
- Too narrow or too vague problems should be avoided.
- The subject selected for research should be familiar and feasible so that the related research material or sources of research are within one's reach. For this purpose, a researcher should contact an expert or a professor in the University who is already engaged in research. He may as well read articles published in current literature available on the subject and may think how the techniques and ideas discussed therein might be applied to the solution of other problems. He may discuss with others what he has in mind concerning a problem. In this way he should make all possible efforts in selecting a problem
- The importance of the subject, the qualifications and the training of a researcher, the costs involved, the time factor are few other criteria that must also be considered in selecting a problem. In other words, before the final selection of a problem is done, a researcher must ask himself the following questions:

- . (a) Whether he is well equipped in terms of his background to carry out the research?
- (b) Whether the study falls within the budget he can afford?
- (c) Whether the necessary cooperation can be obtained from those who must participate in research as subjects?

If the subject for research is selected properly by observing the above mentioned points, the research will not be a boring drudgery, rather it will be love's labour.

3- Techniques involved in defining a Problem.

Defining a research problem means clearly stating the issue to be studied within specific boundaries and with a clear objective. This process is essential to avoid confusion and ensure a structured research approach.

Defining a research problem is challenging and requires careful consideration. Researchers typically begin by posing a broad question, but this often lacks specificity and is unsuitable for testing. Therefore, defining the problem properly is crucial and should not be rushed, as neglecting this step can cause issues later in the research process.

A systematic approach to defining a research problem includes the following steps:

Statement of the Problem in a General Way

The researcher should begin by broadly stating the problem based on practical concerns or intellectual interests. This requires thorough subject immersion, possibly including preliminary fieldwork (pilot survey). If guided by a supervisor or organization, the problem should be refined to remove ambiguities and ensure feasibility.

Understanding the Nature of the Problem

The researcher must explore the origins and objectives of the problem, discussing it with those who first raised it or experts in the field. Considering the study's environment helps in fully grasping the problem's context.

Surveying the Available Literature

A thorough review of existing literature, theories, reports, and previous studies helps narrow the problem's scope, identify research gaps, and determine suitable research techniques. This also highlights potential difficulties and new approaches.

Developing Ideas Through Discussions

Engaging in discussions with colleagues and experts (experience survey) provides valuable insights, sharpens the research focus, and suggests new angles, methodologies, or solutions.

Rephrasing the Research Problem

After understanding the problem, reviewing literature, and discussing it with experts, the researcher refines it into a specific, testable statement. This final step ensures the problem is operationally viable and guides hypothesis development.