



## Formulating The Research Problem: A Study

**M.V. SRINIVASA  
RAO**

M.Com., M.B.A., Lecturer in Commerce, KBN COLLEGE, VIJAYAWADA

### KEYWORDS :

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.

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.

The research process is similar to undertaking a journey. For a research journey there are two important decisions to make. They are:

- 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.

The first and most crucial step in the research process is formulating the research problem. The 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 any area revolves around four Ps:

##### People:

It involves a group of individuals.

##### Problems:

It examines the existence of certain issues or problems relating to their lives; to ascertain attitude of a group of people towards an issue.

##### Programs:

Programs evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention.

##### Phenomena:

A phenomenon establishes the existence of 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 endeavor 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.

**Bring clarity and focus to your research problem:**

The process of reviewing the literature helps you to understand the subject area better and thus 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.

**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.

**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 fulfill this expectation. It also helps you to understand how the findings of your study fit into the existing body of knowledge.

**Contextualize 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.