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# Formulating a Research Problem

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## ABSTRACT

*“A research problem is not solved by apparatus; it is solved in a man’s head.”*

*-Charles Kettering*

*Research is defined as “the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it leads to new and creative outcomes.” Therefore, research is used to further develop the aspects or nuances of a particular area or subject by using the information already available. It is a very important tool because it can continually refine any topic or theory relating to a subject. There are various components of a research paper such as title, abstract, literature review, research methodology, data analysis, research problem, research questions, research objectives, research statement and conclusion.*

*However, a research problem is the basis of a research paper. It is a difficulty, gap, problem or shortcoming which needs to be addressed in the area of research that the Researcher wishes to undertake. Only when a research problem is identified the Researcher can analyze the issues in that particular area and provide the solutions to the problem identified. Framing an articulate and precise research problem is crucial to writing a quality research paper because the success, appropriateness and novelty of a research paper are dependent upon its research problem.*

*The formulation of a research problem may be understood in a better way by understanding the following example. If a researcher wants to critically evaluate the statutory provisions concerning the Independent Directors in India, then the research problem would be stated as follows:*

*“Despite the efforts of the Regulators in India to achieve good Corporate Governance through the introduction and constant evolution of the concept of Independent Directors, corporate scams such as PNB and IL&FS hint at critical evaluation of the role and the legal framework with respect to the Independent Directors. From these instances, it can be seen that the provisions of law relating to the Independent Directors have proven to be insufficiently effective. Especially in the times of COVID-19, when businesses and financial*

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*markets have been reeling under economic pressures, the contribution of the Independent Directors to achieve good Corporate Governance has become more crucial than ever.”*

## I. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this Research Paper are as follows:

- i. To understand the concept of ‘research problem’ by analyzing its types, sources and features; and
- ii. To enumerate the steps that are needed to be taken to formulate a good research problem.

## II. RESEARCH STATEMENT

Following is the analysis of various aspects of the research problem:

### 1. TYPES OF RESEARCH PROBLEMS:

Following are the various types of research problems:

#### i. Theoretical research problem:

A theoretical research problem is a simple and plain description of the theory and does not include any practical application.

#### ii. Relational:

In this type of research problem, the relation between two factors or variables is analyzed. These two factors or variables are generally connected.

#### iii. Casual:

A casual research problem denotes the cause and effect relationship between two or more variables within the area of research.

#### iv. Applied:

In the case of an applied research problem, there

is an actual practical application of theory in the research problem.

#### v. Action:

In an action research problem, there is an indication of immediate action to be taken. It generally relates to societal issues.

## 2. SOURCES OF RESEARCH PROBLEM:

The most important sources of a research problem are stated below:

#### i. Critical evaluation of existing literature:

The Researcher may find gaps or shortcomings in the evaluation of the existing literature in a particular area of research. These issues may encourage the Researcher to take up the research in the respective area to address such issues.

#### ii. Past research:

The past research in a particular area of research may be insufficient, or they may inadequately address certain aspects in that subject, and therefore, they can prove to be an important source of a research problem.

#### iii. Personal experience:

The personal experience of a researcher in day-to-day life or any issue faced by the Researcher may prompt him/her to take up the research in that particular area. For example, if a husband is a victim of domestic violence, he may wish to take legal action against his wife under the Domestic Violence Act, 2005. However, if he is unable to do so because of the absence of such

provision in the said law (in favour of a male partner), then he may be curious or eager to undertake research (either himself or he may encourage/brief someone else) to analyze the absence of gender-neutral laws in India.

**iv. Practical experience:**

The Researcher may formulate the research problem based on his/her practical experience in any profession or vocation. The need for research may arise out of any practical difficulty or issue faced by the Researcher at the workplace.

**v. Social issues:**

The social issues present in the society in any region, state or country may be an important source of a research problem. For example, in India, the problem of corruption may be taken as an inspiration by the Researcher as a topic of research. And then, the research problem may be formulated based on parameters such as current corruption trends in India and the legal framework in place to address this social issue.

**vi. Legal framework:**

The legal framework with respect to any particular area can prove to be a good source for research in that area. For example, if a researcher analyzes that there have been anti-competitive practices in the times of COVID-19 in India. Then he/she may formulate a research problem on this basis with an objective to critically evaluate the competition law framework of this country and the lapses in it which lead to such

anti-competitive practices during the situation of the pandemic.

**vii. Judicial decisions:**

Judicial decisions on any particular topic can invite several research studies which examine, analyze or critically evaluate such decisions. In India, when the Supreme Court passed the Sabarimala Judgment<sup>2</sup>, several pieces of research were undertaken, and research problems were formulated to examine the provisions relating to the religious rights of women in India, to analyze the social viewpoint regarding this topic and the acceptability of the said Judgment by the public.

**viii. Inspiration from previous research:**

A researcher may conduct a similar kind of study which is already published in the context of another geographical area or to a different kind of population. For example, if a research study is already done regarding the efficacy of good Corporate Governance practices in western Countries, a research problem may be formulated to analyze the efficacy of such practices in India.

**ix. Contradictory research results:**

A research problem may be formulated to examine the contradictory results of any two or more previously published studies. Such research would aim to understand the reason for such conflict and to support one of the many theories published with respect to that particular topic.

**x. Brainstorming sessions:**

In brainstorming sessions, several people generate various ideas which are discussed and

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<sup>2</sup> Indian Young Lawyer's Association v. The State of Kerala, AIR 2018 SC (Supp) 1650, also available at the official website of the Supreme Court-

[https://main.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2006/18956/18956\\_2006\\_Judgement\\_28-Sep-2018.pdf](https://main.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2006/18956/18956_2006_Judgement_28-Sep-2018.pdf) (last visited on 07/12/2021).

which then encourage the framing of different research problems. Such sessions are a source of innovative suggestions which can be taken up as new topics for research.

**xi. Consultation with experts:**

Experts have specialized knowledge in any particular area. In consultations with experts, new research problems may be identified because of the clarity attained with respect to that particular subject.

**xii. Funded research:**

Several organizations fund research in a particular field for understanding the reasons for profitability of competitor's products vis-à-vis their products or for studying the market of a particular geographical region before the launching of new products in that area. Such funded researches are an important source of research problems.

**xiii. Consumer feedback:**

Based on the consumer feedback, the Organizations may wish to conduct studies in order to improve the customer experience. Such field research is one of the many sources of a research problem.

**xiv. Academic requirements:**

Many times, as part of the academic syllabus, the students undertake research studies in the domain of their specialization areas to acquire a better understanding of that subject. In the process of undertaking this kind of research, innovative research problems may be formulated.

**3. CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD RESEARCH PROBLEM:**

Following are the characteristics of a good research problem:

**i. Clear and concise:**

The research problem should be stated in a clear and concise manner. The reflection of clarity in the research problem is of utmost importance.

**ii. Limited scope and specificity:**

The scope of the research problem should be limited so that all the issues within that area of research are sufficiently addressed. Also, the research problem should be specific, and there should not be any hint of vagueness in it.

**iii. New and innovative:**

The research problem should be creative. It should not be a repetition of what is already written unless there is some value addition to it. There should be a reflection of innovation in the research problem.

**iv. Interesting:**

The research problem should be interesting. It is the basis of any research paper and gives an idea of what is written in the entire paper. And therefore, it should awaken the interest of the readers in reading that research paper.

**v. Capability to address a difficulty, gap, problem or shortcoming:**

The research problem should address a difficulty, gap, problem or shortcoming in the theory or subject in which the Researcher wants to conduct the research. It should not be a mere statement of facts.

**vi. Relation to any academic field of study and availability of research material:**

The research problem should be related to an academic field of study, and there should be enough material available for conducting the desired research. If there is no material available in that domain, then it may become difficult for the Researcher to reach a conclusion.

**vii. Ability to generate research questions:**

The research problem should be such that it should be able to generate the research questions. Only when the research questions are established a researcher can address them in his/her research work.

**4. STEPS TO BE TAKEN FOR FORMULATING A RESEARCH PROBLEM**

**i. Identifying the broad area of study of research:**

Before formulating a research problem, it is crucial to understand the broad study area in which the Researcher wants to undertake the research. For example, if a student wants to undertake a research study in the subject of Jurisprudence, then it is important to identify a broad area in the subject of jurisprudence. For example, gender justice may be the chosen broad area in the subject of jurisprudence.

**ii. Bifurcating the broad study area into sub-areas:**

The broad study area should be further classified into sub-areas so that the scope of the research paper is narrowed down. When sub-areas are identified, it is easier for the Researcher to choose the exact topic of the research paper. For

example, in the above chosen broad area, sub-areas may be chosen, such as gender justice in the legal frameworks in India, gender injustice prevalent in the socio-economical aspects in India, etc.

**iii. Selecting the topic of the research paper from the various sub-areas identified:**

After all the sub-areas are identified, the Researcher chooses the area on which he/she wishes to work upon. Choosing a specific area of research from various sub-areas under a broad topic is important, or else the research problem would become vague, and it will not address all the intricacies of a particular subject. In the scenario illustrated above, the Researcher may select the topic of gender equality in the legal frameworks in India as the sub-area and then further narrow it down and finally work on the topic of gender justice in the personal laws in India as the subject of the research paper.

**iv. Identifying and reviewing the context of the research problem:**

The context of the research problem should be properly identified and reviewed before the research problem is finalized. This is an important step because once the context of the research problem is set, working within those boundaries is easy. Also, no crucial aspect of the research topic is missed out, and all the areas are properly covered.

**v. Reviewing the nature of the research problem:**

Once a draft research problem is formulated, its nature should be reviewed. The nature of the research problem can range from

simple to complex. The nature of the research problem should be in synchronization with the research study that is undertaken. For example, if the research study is simply descriptive about some variables, then the nature of the research problem should not appear complicated and should be outlined in a simple manner.

**vi. Understanding the variables in the research study:**

The variables to be included in the research study and the effect of such variables on the conclusion should be pre-determined. Also, the relationships between such variables should be anticipated before proceeding with the research.

**vii. Anticipating the alternative approaches**

The alternative approaches to a particular theory or subject should be anticipated because they can have an impact on the conclusion of the research. And accordingly, the research problem should be formulated.

**viii. Framing the research questions:**

As stated before as well, a research problem should be such that it should lead to the framing of reasonable research questions. And hence, once an area of research is finalized, the Researcher should attempt to frame research questions. If it is not possible to frame clear research questions, then there would be a need to re-frame the research problem.

**ix. Structuring the research problem:**

The research problem should be structured in a proper manner. It should give a clear description of the issue that the Researcher aims to look at in the particular subject matter of the research.

**x. Revising the research problem:**

The research problem should be thoroughly checked and revised before it is finalized. Revision is important to analyze if any point has been missed or if any aspect of the concerned subject is not stated correctly.

**III. CONCLUSION**

Therefore, from the above discussion, it is clear what exactly a research problem is and the features that it has, such as its types, sources and characteristics. Also, as all further aspects of the research paper, such as research questions, research objectives, etc., are dependent on the research problem, it is important that the research problem is formulated in a proper manner by following all the afore-stated steps. The research problem is the foundation of any research paper, and hence, the Researcher should ensure that this foundation is strong and well-structured.

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