

Block 4

Developing a Research Project



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UNIT 13 IDENTIFYING A RESEARCH PROBLEM*

Structure

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13.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- gain knowledge of the fact or to achieve new insight which is termed as the *exploratory or formulative* research;
- provide the accurate characteristics of a particular individuals, situation or a group which is termed as *descriptive* research; and
- establish the frequency in which something occurs or with which it is associated with something else which is termed as *diagnostic* research.

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13.1 INTRODUCTION

Research is generally referred to as a search for knowledge. According to Clifford Woody, ‘research comprises defining and redefining problems, formulating hypothesis or suggested solutions; collecting, organising and evaluating data; making decisions and reaching conclusions; and at last carefully testing the conclusions to determine whether it fit the formulating hypothesis (Kothari, 2008:1).’ In simple words, research can be defined as a scientific and systematic search for important information on a specific issue. Because of its systematic effort to achieve new knowledge it is referred to as an art of scientific investigation. Knowledge, in the first place, does not occur on its own; it is a product of social practices and developments. Usually, the production of knowledge starts when an individual, the public, governments or experts identify certain inadequacy in certain areas of knowledge. The problem is then put up to competent authorities for approval and support. Successful proposals are then carried by the researchers and with their experiences and skills research findings are produced. Finally, on a larger scale, the public and the government debate over the research findings and legislate it for its appropriate uses. In sum, research contributes in advancing the existing reserve of knowledge, helps in pursuing the truth through empirical studies by observation and comparison. This way knowledge is a product of an effort of the social groups as much as of an individual. In short, the search for knowledge by applying objective and systematic method to find a solution to a problem is research.

13.2 WHAT IS A ‘RESEARCH PROBLEM’?

Identifying a problem is the beginning of a research enterprise. The duty of the researcher is to find out the best answer or a solution to the given problem. The researcher’s work can suffer bad outcome if the enterprise begin in faulty selection of a problem. It means that the researcher has to find a way to accomplish the research problem successfully by selecting the appropriate problem and formulating it favourably according to the context of a given situation. For instance, a natural calamity may change in the course of research thus disturbing the values of the outcome of the research, or, many alternative course of action may be available, or, certain people not involved in making decision may cause distress to them and may react satisfactorily or unsatisfactorily, and so forth. These kinds of tentative elements which may crop up in the course of a research may be considered in the context of identifying a research problem.

A research problem is a condition that arouses the curiosity in a researcher. It is a condition that fuels the mind of a researcher with a sense of wanting to know more, to challenge or substantiate the existing body of knowledge, to clarify doubts, to find new answers and solutions, to determine the facts of certain problems and to develop new theories.

Generally, researchers consider that there is a research problem when an individual or a group of people or an organisation have a problem with an objective to be achieved by pursuing alternative course of action and solving the problem in a given situation. Following are the consideration in identifying a research problem: a research problem should comprise of:

- there must be an individual or a group which has some problem
- there must be some objective(s) to be accomplished
- there must be alternative courses of action for obtaining the objective
- there must be doubt with regard to the selection of alternatives
- there must be some situation(s) to which the difficulty of the problem can be solved

We may reflect this problem with an illustration as given below.

Let us call the individual Ms. Chinly to whom the problem can be attributed. Ms. Chinly has a doubt, let us say to pursue her degree, which is controlled by two variables, namely, the problem of choosing between higher education and vocational studies, let us call it Course 1 and Course 2 (C1 and C2). There must be at least two course of action to be pursued within uncontrolled variables in order to achieve the objective. It means that in the two course of action, one course of action should be preferable over the other course of action. This means out of the two course of action, Chinly should have one outcome which she wants, because if both the course of action is realised then the choice of obtaining the objective no longer matters. In other words, the two choices that Chinly has must have unequal effectiveness for the desired outcome of her objective.

The illustration brings us to an understanding that the basic element of a research problem is a state of mind beginning with having a doubt and wanting to know something which becomes the problem. The doubt starts the beginning of research questions of how, what, where, when and why. For example;

- Ms. Chinly has to decide whether to go for higher studies or go for vocational education. Some people who know her may ask; What difference would it make in choosing either of the programme? Is there a difference in terms of which degree she possess? What kind of impact would she have in a society after she finishes her studies? How would Chinly's decision influence her peers?
- In a class there are some students who score better marks than others. This observation of some students scoring better than the others may prompt someone to ask questions as to; Why? Which student? What was the marking pattern like? When will the majority of the class score better marks?

In short, the doubt and observation born out of curiosity triggers the inquiring mind and stimulates to ask questions and that is what is called the research problem.

13.3 IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

The core of research is the problem. Problem for research could be everywhere but the success of the research problem rests upon the success of how intense the research endeavour is undertaken. To formulate research questions is not easy. In the beginning it might be easy to formulate a problem but to convert it into a successful research it needs a considerable knowledge of both the subject of interest and research methodology. The research problem should be formulated in such a way that it can withstand the scrutiny of the research process. Here lies the importance of spending a significant amount of time to think and formulate the research problem that is researchable. The primary step to a clear research process is the formulation of a research problem. It is the most crucial step to the whole research process. Before the research is undertaken, a researcher must consider the following key factors;

Topic: Research involves a long period of intense hard work and concentration. If the topic of the research does not interest the researcher, it would be difficult to write. It is therefore important to have a topic that is interesting enough to motivate the researcher throughout the research project. The researcher must also keep in mind not to undertake a topic that is overdone because it will not be easy to bring new element to the already existing subject. Avoiding narrow and vague topics is another aspect of caution a researcher must take.

Expertise: Quite often than not, potential research questions may occur but the process of formulating them into meaningful and sustainable research is not an easy task. In order to have a meaningful research, a researcher needs to have a certain level of understanding of the subject and the research methodology s/he proposes to undertake. A preliminary survey or what is referred to as pilot survey is often considered desirable for a clear understanding of the research problem. A researcher may team up field observation activities with readings to build a research problem along with the help of the supervisor(s). A researcher must not be misled with the idea that the supervisor will do the work. It is the duty of the researcher to do the work and for the supervisor to guide in the research process.

Availability of data: Not all researches are secondary based where materials are considerably easy to procure. Some research studies are based on the subjects that may not be easily available like; census, proceedings, reports, unclassified documents, etc. In this case, sometimes the availability of the materials pertaining to the interest of the researcher may not be sufficient. In this matter, the researcher must first make sure that s/he does not make the mistake of giving the research a topic before ascertaining the availability of the materials.

Relevance: A close examination of the research problem will enable the researcher to understand the complexity of formulating a research problem into something that is researchable. Hence, it is very important that a researcher spend a considerable amount of time in preparing a researchable research problem. Research involves a long period of time with constant demand to perform.

Therefore, for the sustainability of the research, the researcher must always choose a topic that interests her/him and also that aligns with her/his profession. This relevance will not only add to the existing body of knowledge but will also help the researcher to sustain the rigours of research throughout the research period.

Ethics: Ethics, which is essential to every aspect of social life, is an equally essential tool in research. Research, especially in social science, generally involves individuals, a group of people or an organisation. Except for the type of research that are data based and have already been collected such as the census, proceedings, reports, unclassified documents, etc, the researcher will be asking people questions, observing their activities, or gathering information about them. All these dealings with people revolve around ethical issues as much as it is familiar with the ethical issues relating to the researcher which includes issues of loyalty, honesty, integrity and transparency.

It is important for the researcher to place herself/himself in the position of the respondent before setting out to ask questions because being thoughtful and considerate to others feeling will help guide the researcher a long way. The researcher by being considerate and thoughtful shows that s/he is prepared and have carefully worked out the research problem both in terms of time management and carefully designed form of interviews and questionnaires. By being inconsiderate or poorly prepared, the researcher runs the risk of wasting the time and effort of others, and jeopardise future research prospects on top of letting herself/himself down.

Some of the important features of ethics involved in research are:

- Respect the participants' time by preparing interviews and questionnaires with a clear focus.
- Respect the participants' privacy and do not offend, embarrass or annoy them because they are the resource of the research.
- Get a letter of recommendation/introduction duly signed by the Supervisor or the Head of Department to secure the cooperation of those people to be studied.
- Produce the identity card issued by the institution showing details of the researcher. This way, the participants get to know that the researcher is being honest about the identity and purpose.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What is a research problem?

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2) What is the significance of a research problem?

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13.4 WHERE TO LOOK FOR A RESEARCH PROBLEM?

The success of the researcher's research depends on the wise selection of a research problem. This means that the researcher has to have a keen eye while looking out for a research problem for all practical purposes. Thus, a researcher may look for a research problem where s/he can sail smoothly over the research process and also gain the satisfaction of suffering on an intellectual plane. In order to fulfil these research demands, a researcher may look at the importance of the subject, a suitable guide who would help in giving necessary directions, do a good deal of literature review and find the research problem, reflect on one's own experiences, test prevailing theories, and weigh the costs involved and search for financial agencies to support the research project. S. L. Sharma (1982:302) suggests three key sources of finding a research problem:

1. Research supervisor
2. Research literature
3. Research funding agencies

A research supervisor is somebody who research students look up to for all the problems they face in dealing with research. Generally, when students desirous of doing research approach the supervisor, the supervisor recommends existing research literature for searching a problem. Research books and research journals helps in clarifying certain doubts and strengthens the research problem that the researcher has been struggling when s/he got started. While reading these literatures, a researcher may find research problem of an unexplored area, or maybe able to challenge the existing theory, or find new ways to ask questions. The third and very important research problem a researcher may look for is the research funding agencies. No research is possible without sufficient funding. Fees, books, stationeries, field works, commuting fares, etc., does not come easy.

A researcher who is able to relieve all these experiences and work on it would be a success. This brings to conclusion that, although different aids are indispensable for a successful research, a researcher should look for a research problem identified by herself/ himself. By doing so the researcher is able to suffer at an intellectual plane born out of her/his own inner experience.

13.4.1 Personal Interest and Sense of Engagement

A research is defined by intellectual curiosity. It is a process that involves a long period of rigorous and minute attention to the research problem and which cannot be accomplished hurriedly. A researcher is someone who is in search of some unanswered questions and thus fuelled with the intrinsic thirst for finding the research problem. Remarkable attention and patience of a researcher go a long way in finding the answers to the research problem.

The characteristic of research demands undivided attention and it makes the researcher indispensable to the research problem. When a researcher takes up a research problem, it requires her/him to immerse thoroughly with the subject matter that s/he wished to problematise. The researcher needs to understand the nature of the problem and the researcher has to review a large body of literature to be well conversant with the problem s/he is dealing with and relevant theories. These are activities which only a researcher involved in a research can engage in and answer to. This is why in order to pursue certain research one needs to have a personal interest which will give her/him the sense of engagement until the research is over.

13.4.2 Consultation with Experts

While doing research, ambiguous statements may cause problem to the body of research. A calm and clear thought process is needed to do the rethinking over the problem. In this kind of situation the best way to solve the problem is to have discussion(s) with those who first worked on the question. This way the researcher is able to know how the problem came to light in the first place and with what purpose. The researcher may further have discussion with people who have good knowledge of the concerned problem or those with similar problems.

13.4.3 Review of Previous Studies

Review of literature opens up a wide area of knowledge from where the researcher can find her/his own on research problem, challenge the findings of others, and add to the existing body of knowledge. As the researcher turns pages, the literature will reflect whether the study is aiming to influence social policy or social theory. Trying to go for an unmarked, without boundary reading will sometimes cost the researcher her/his precious time. Since research is usually time bound, it is agreeable that a researcher must do selective reading, and adhere to topics that are directly relevant to the research undertaken. Selective reading is a skill in itself which every researcher should know how (Seale, 2012:106). If there are other researchers with relevant research problem, the researcher may make an effort to reach out to those with similar problem so that those researchers may be able to give an idea of how to go about. This way arguments are strengthened, existing body of knowledge gets refined, certain lacunas are filled.

13.4.4 Demand from the people/community

‘Knowledge does not hang in space; it is a product of social processes (Bouma and Ling, 2006:3).’ In order to have a strong community there must be a certain system of functionality regulating the lives of the general mass. Now, when social system breaks down the lives of the public is affected. The breakdown of the system could manifest in the form of discontentment leading to the disruption in both private and public life. This disruptive situation produces a demand for a well researched body of knowledge. Researchers take to task the tested situation(s) of the people/community to produce adequate knowledge which could help in finding a remedy for the people.

13.4.5 Demand from the Government and/or Civil Society

Governments and Civil Societies play a huge role in the production of knowledge in different ways. Civil societies are organisations that work to push the interest of the people to the government without any political affiliation. For example, the incorporation of ‘None of the above (NOTA)’ in the electronic voting machine in India; NOTA is a movement for electoral reform lead by civil society activist Kisan Baburao Hazare, popularly known as Anna Hazare, in 2011. It advocated the right of the voter to choose not to vote were there no candidate of her/his choice which is called Right to Reject. After much demand today NOTA is incorporated in the electronic voting machine. The new knowledge (NOTA) was legislated through enormous amount of debating and demonstrations for its appropriate uses which was cautiously weighed by both the government and the civil society activists that were demanding for NOTA. In the process a huge body of knowledge has been produced for the consumption of both the people and the government. One must understand that both government and civil society are interdependent on each other; the ideas and knowledge generated by the civil societies cannot be implement without the government’s approval, so also the government cannot isolate itself from civil societies because the ground work are usually generated by the civil societies.

13.4.6 Relevance to Contemporary Social, Political, Economic Situation

A good researcher will keep in mind to be relevant to her/his times. An outdated research is a wasted effort. A researcher cannot compare the peasant movements of the nineteenth century which were mostly directed against the greedy zamindars with the present time farmers strikes. In present day farmers protest, for example, the Jat Reservation Agitation in February 2016 in the state of Haryana, the farmers seek to attain ‘backward status’ which is associated with jobs and education reservations. Jats mostly live in Haryana, Punjab, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and they originally belonged to farming communities. They are considered to be about 82.5 millions and are politically active (The Hindu, February 20, 2016). The example reiterates on how research should be relevant according to the contemporary social, political and economic situation.

13.5 STEPS TO IDENTIFY A RESEARCH PROBLEM?

It is said that a problem clearly stated is a problem half solved. Before venturing into a research problem, a researcher must have a clear idea of the topic s/he has selected keeping in mind the rigours of a research that is going to be involved. It is important that a researcher:

- Do a preliminary study
- Choose a subject (broad) that would interest both the researcher and the readers
- Choose a topic (specific) that others will be doing research on and which has the potential of further interesting arguments
- Stay focused on what it is that s/he is trying to explain or prove. For example, if a researcher wants to do research on poverty elevation in urban setting, s/he might ask: What impact does urbanisation have on child labour?
- Avoid vague and irrelevant research problems
- Avoid overworked research problem because it will be difficult to throw new light on the already overworked topic
- Know that an average researcher must avoid controversial topics because it may cause more hurdles than solutions
- Know that a research problem should be chosen according to the capacity of a researcher
- Must consider the time, cost, hard work and other tentative problems involved in the research process

13.5.1 Identify the Broad Domain of Enquiry

A broad domain of inquiry is a situation where one sees a possible need for research and solving the problem. For example, a researcher may stumble upon an article written about her community and she finds that the facts are fabricated. It is enough reason for her to locate the problem and solve it by writing about her community based on correct information. By reading the article she had already started her inquiry.

13.5.2 Understand the Nature and Scope of the Problem

While caught up in the excitement in the initial stage of research, it is hard for a researcher to grasp the nuances of the subject matter. An important avenue to help clear the doubt/problem is to do a literature review which will open a wide range of knowledge. However, since research is usually time bound, the researcher must do some smart and selective readings. Selective reading is a skill in itself which every researcher should know how. The best way to solve the problem is to have discussion(s) with those who have first worked on the subject.

This will help the researcher to know how the problem came to light in the first place and with what purpose. Having discussions with people who have good knowledge of the concerned problem or those with similar problems is a good way of understating the problem, narrowing down to specifics and getting a clear idea of the problem.

13.5.3 Determine the Feasibility of the Study of the Research Problem

The three key norms for problem statement are: the quality of the problem statement, its relevance and its feasibility. A problem statement is feasible if the following conditions are met:

- the researcher is able to answer the problem statement within the restrictions of the research project
- restrictions could be possibly related to time and money and the expertise of the researcher answer
- that, the researcher is able to develop a narrowed down research question which can be investigated with a reasonable amount of time and efforts

13.5.4 State the Research Problem and Prepare the Research Design Beforehand

A research problem is a state of mind beginning with having a doubt and wanting to know something which becomes the problem. The doubt starts the beginning of research questions of how, what, where, when and why?

A research design makes research project efficient with maximum information with minimum expenditure of effort, time and money. Having a research design is like having a blueprint drawn by an expert for constructing a new house. Likewise, a researcher should prepare in advance how to collect data and be able to do an analysis of the research project. Designing the research project thoughtlessly may result in rendering the research exercise futile. The researcher must therefore give great care in drawing up efficient and appropriate design before starting research operations.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Explain the role of the Research Supervisor in identifying the research problem?

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13.6 LET US SUM UP

A research problem is a condition that arouses the curiosity in a researcher. It is a condition that fuels the mind of a researcher with a sense of wanting to know

more, to challenge or substantiate the existing body of knowledge, to clarify doubts, to find new answers and solutions, to determine the facts of certain problems and to develop new theories.

The success of the researcher's research depends on the wise selection of a research problem. This means that the researcher has to have a keen eye while looking out for a research problem for all practical purposes. Thus, a researcher may look for a research problem where s/he can sail smoothly over the research process and also gain the satisfaction of suffering on an intellectual plane.

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13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) A research problem is a condition that arouses the curiosity in a researcher. It is a condition that fuels the mind of a researcher with a sense of wanting to know more, to challenge or substantiate the existing body of knowledge, to clarify doubts, to find new answers and solutions, to determine the facts of certain problems and to develop new theories.
- 2) Identifying a problem is the beginning of a research enterprise. The duty of the researcher is to find out the best answer or a solution to the given problem. The researcher's work can suffer bad outcome if the enterprise begin in faulty selection of a problem. It means that the researcher has to find a way to accomplish the research problem successfully by selecting the appropriate problem and formulating it favourably according to the context of a given situation.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Role of supervisor is an important aspect while guiding the research students who face the problem in dealing with research. Generally, when student decisions of doing research approach the supervisor, the supervisor, the supervisor recommends existing research literature for searching a problem.

UNIT 14 PREPARING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL*

Structure

14.0 Objectives

14.1 Introduction

14.2 What is a Research Proposal?

14.3 Important Issues in Writing a Research Proposal

14.4 Structure of the Research Proposal

14.4.1 Cover page

14.4.2 Title Page

14.4.3 Abstract

14.4.4 Introduction

14.4.5 Review of Literature

14.4.6 Objectives

14.4.7 Methodology of the Study

14.4.8 Human Resource

14.4.9 Financial Details

14.5 Let Us Sum Up

14.6 References

14.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you would be able to:

- explain what a research proposal is; and
- outline the steps in preparing a research proposal.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

A research proposal lays out an organized plan for converting an idea into a well carried out research. It is intended to be presented before an appropriate person, committee and/ or organization. The purpose of research proposal may include: writing a dissertation, conducting research for higher degrees of education and applying for funding to various organizations to conduct research. It outlines a plan of action for conducting the research, which can be either accepted or rejected, upon submission.

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In this unit, we will discuss the relevance of a research proposal, discuss the important factor that needs to be considered in writing a research proposal and outline the in air steps in writing a research proposal.

14.2 WHAT IS A RESEARCH PROPOSAL?

The prospects of acceptance of any research proposal depend upon multiple factors. While the preponderance of acceptance or rejection of a research proposal would always be subjective, the factors given on the next page are important.

- a) The topic of the research proposal must fall within the area of interest of the institution or organization to which it is being submitted.
- b) The research proposal must enumerate which are relevant to the study.
- c) The content of the research proposal must be coherent, convincing and devoid of any contradictions.
- d) The research proposal must lay out a time line; either broad or detailed.

14.3 IMPORTANT ISSUES IN WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Though there may be different purposes for writing a research proposal, there exist some common aspects which apply to all kinds of research proposals. The aspects are- accuracy, brevity, clarity, details and English which are very significant at the preparatory stage of writing any research proposal. The following section would explain the different aspects by taking an example on writing a research proposal for the usage of mobile phones by refugees in India

Accuracy: To have accuracy while preparing the research proposal, one must, firstly, review the pre-existing research on related topics or topics which may lend an understanding of the topic at hand. In the above-mentioned example, one must start with the review of literature on the usage of mobile phones in other parts of the world. This would give an idea that how this usage has been studied in other contexts and how that can be located in the context of India. In addition to that one must look at the studies already done in the Indian context on the usage of mobile phones by refugees. This will allow you to think, that what new you are aiming to do by your research proposal. A thoroughly done literature review would enable the researcher to have all the right facts about the related topic, which would contribute in making realistic claims about the research. Also, review of literature would enable you to identity the gaps in knowledge which your research could full up. The review of Literature on mobile phone usage could reveal that very few studies are done relating income and gender with use of mobile phones. You could consider including aspects of income and gender your study.

Brevity: You could divide the material (on the basis of which you are writing research proposal) into two sections- main points and additional points. The

research proposal should primarily comprise of what you evaluate as main points. This will allow you present your idea in a pertinent way. The various questions you aim to ask and why you aim to ask them become your main points and the description for the justifications of those questions can be your additional points. It must be borne in mind that, the receiver of the research proposal is always at liberty to call for more explanation and substantiation, if the need arises. The brevity should be such that it conveys the message that the proposal has been able to capture the essence of what it intends to undertake. It should be as short and crisp as possible.

Clarity: While writing a research proposal, there should be clarity, firstly, at the level of understanding and secondly, at the level of communicating it in writing. There must be clarity of thought with reference to the objectives, needs and benefit of the research being proposed. The concepts and the theory, wherever applicable, must be well thought about. On the other hand, there must be clarity in communication with reference to communicating the objectives, needs and benefits of the research proposal. They need not be made complicated, so as to give any artificial impression of sophistication. The communication of concepts and theory, if applicable, should be made in clear terms without distorting or diluting the essence of it.

This aspect involves discretion of balance. It may be carried out in the following manner:

- a) The important details must be first segregated. Any area of research would involve vast background and already done research around it. One must decide what details about the research area are to be included in the proposal. There would always be a limitation on the word limit pertaining to research proposal, so one must include the most crucial aspects of the research problems, which make it a relevant topic to be researched upon.
- b) There may be a further refinement of these details into details of:

What is to be done?- This would be the introduction of the research proposal. In the given example, you may include what do propose to study in the context of refugees.

Details of – Why it is to be done?- This would explain the rational and the relevance of the research. This section is the most important one to defend/justify the need to conduct the research. This section would indicate that that why you think that studying the usage of mobile phones in the refugees' context is important. Highlight the gaps in the understanding pertaining to the same issue.

How it is to be done?- This would incorporate the methodology of the research. How do you propose to collect data around the research questions? How would you analyze it. Broadly, this would elaborate that what is your research design. Is it qualitative or quantitative? What would be your sample size? How would you approach your sample? How do you propose to present the data?

- c) Once these three set of details are sufficiently incorporated in the research proposal, the rest of the details may be arranged and kept as back up information, to be made available on demand or at best as an appendix, if need be. Sometimes you would be needing lot of information while making presentation about your research proposal; you may keep all other relevant information to be mentioned at that stage as all the information cannot be provided in research proposal.

Box 14.1 Introductory Remarks on Research Proposal

Research Proposals are closely linked to the whole issue of a research project. For the researcher who has done a thorough job of planning his or her research, it may virtually appear as if the proposal flows onto the paper without any undue effort on his or her part. That is, however, merely part of the whole issue. Apart from the fact that the research proposal is a planning document in which the researcher indicates what he or she plans to do, and how he or she plans to set about it. The proposal is used as a source of information, and serves as the basis upon which decision makers decide whether the project ought to be approved or not and, whether the funds that have been requested are to be granted. It is, therefore, a quite clearly of considerable importance that the proposal should convey a favourable impression of the project and of the researcher.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What is a research proposal?

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- 2) Outline the importance of research proposal.

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14.4 STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Research proposal could be on any researchable topic. Although there is no hard a fast rule, we follow certain structure while writing a research proposal. We present below a broad outline of the structure of a research proposal.

14.4.1 Cover Page

The cover page is the first page of any research proposal. Firstly, the Format and Content of the cover page may be subject to the prescriptions of the Organization where the research proposal is being submitted. Secondly, the nature of the

research proposal may also have a bearing upon the layout of the cover page. However, some general features of the cover page may be as follows:

- a) Title of the research proposal (We discuss some points on the Title in the next sub-section).
- b) Date/ Month and Year of submission.
- c) Details of who is submitting the research proposal.
- d) Mention of the place where the research proposal is being submitted.

14.4.2 Title Page

The following information may be furnished in this section.

- a) Title of the Research Proposal –

It should be shortest possible description comprising of the most relevant keywords regarding the research proposal. It should be such that it can be used to index that particular research proposal. However, the language used should not be over technical and at the cost of coherence and comprehension.

Attempt should be made, to ensure, that the title remains restricted to one line of the page only. If at all it spills over, it should be broken in such a manner that the main title should be just a few words in the first line and the second line should be the longer line, functioning as a subtitle or qualifier.

The title is the most important part of the research proposal, not only because it is the significant originator of the 'First Impression' but also because in most cases, it will be the only interface and contact between the research proposal and others.

- b) Submitted by – The Legal name, address, contact number of the entity submitting it. It can be either an individual or an organization.
- c) Submitted to – The legal name, address where the research proposal is being submitted.
- d) Initiated by – In some cases the research proposal may be submitted through a distinct formal channel/ Institution, while the initiative may be located elsewhere. In this case the details of the person or the organization where the research proposal originates, need to be furnished. That is, name, address, contact details and any other detail, if applicable.
- e) Principal Investigator – The name of the principal investigator may or may not be known at the stage of submission of the research proposal. In case it is known, then the details of the same must be furnished.

14.4.3 Abstract

The abstract is a very concise and succinct enumeration of the significant facts, hypothesis, justification, objective and methodology that constitutes the research proposal.

- a) It should ideally be one page or maximum two pages.
- b) It is placed immediately after the title page.

14.4.4 Introduction

This section would elaborate that what is to be studied (the subject matter of research or the research problem). Here you should mention issues such as: What is the context, what is the background of the study. This section would also include the rationale and the relevance of the study. This section is the most important one to justify the need to conduct research. This section would indicate that that why you think that studying the usage of mobile phones in the refugees' context is important. Highlight the gaps in the understanding pertaining to the same issue.

The following points should be kept in mind:

- a) This section should lay down, what needs to be studied.
- b) This section should lay down the need for the particular research.
- c) The purpose for undertaking the particular research. The void it will fill up or the understanding it will render or the change of circumstances, it will study.

14.4.5 Review of Literature

The research proposal must put forward the research which has been done and is being done in related fields or fields which may have a bearing on the subject matter to be researched.

It must state as to how this research is intended to add to the pre-existing and current related research.

A summary of all such researches must be furnished along with appropriate references.

A priority of such references may be drawn in case the researches relevant to the context are too many in number. Less important researches may be added in an appendix

Caution must be exercised, to ensure that no relevant researches get omitted, as an error of omission may easily give an impression of an error of commission.

14.4.6 Objectives

The problem has been stated earlier, this section must lay down in clear terms, how the research intends to solve the problem.

This section must lay down the hypothesis or the question which needs to be tested or answered.

14.4.7 Methodology of the Study

This is the most closely evaluated section of a research proposal as far as the prospects of acceptance or refusal of the research proposal is concerned. It lays down the method of research to be adopted for achieving the desired results.

This section must be essentially very clear and exact. The necessary ingredients of this section are as follows:

Nature of the sample size or the subject matter to be studied.

The criterion of selection of this sample size or the data which need to be studied.

Description of the variables which are to be studied.

The treatment intended to be given to these variables.

Details of the control group, if applicable.

The nature of data to be gathered; interview, questionnaire or any other type.

Relation between the data and the objectives sought to be achieved.

Enumeration of the research methodology, that needs to be adopted and a description of its nexus with the objective of the research proposal.

Time Line: this part should be made as detailed as possible with reference to each stage of the research; it should be realistic.

Flow Charts depicting the activities involved along with the time frames for each of the activities/ stages.

14.4.8 Human Resource

This step is important for such research proposal, where it is submitted for get some funding for the research. Here the details of the Principal Investigator including work experience in reference to the context become very relevant. Apart from that the details of any intended Advisory Committee, which may be formed or the purposes of the advising upon the research, also adds to the seriousness and reliability of the research proposal.

14.4.9 Financial Details

The research proposal for funded research projects must lay down the total cost. If, possible on a yearly basis.

(a) Direct Costs

(i) Salaries

- List of all people separately along with their designations. For example; Director, Consultants, Assistant Director, Research Associate, Secretarial Assistant, Clerical Assistant etc. (However, the nomenclature and functions may vary on a case to case basis.)

- The time period for each person. The amount of salary. The Grade pays, if applicable.
- (ii) Benefits to the employees – any added benefits which are to be given to the people employed in the research project
- (iii) Travel Allowances
- Details of staff travel allowances.
 - Details of travel expenditure on non-staff travels; meetings, consultants, or any other travel. Details of such travels and people traveling therein.
- (iv) Equipment
- Standard equipment relating to office infrastructure.
 - Special equipment, if applicable, the modalities of acquisition and the expenditure thereto.
- (v) Supplies
- Office supplies; stationary, letter heads, papers, print cartridges etc.
 - Special supplies if needed, which may be variable as per the needs of the research.
- (vi) Communication Expenses – Installation and usage charges for all forms of communication services and devices. For example, internet, telephone, mobile etc.
- (vii) Printing and duplication – Photocopy or out sourced printing expenses if any.
- (viii) Rent – There must be a reasonable proportionality between the location and the size of premises sought to be taken on rent with reference to the number of people needed to be working in that workspace. The details of the rent and advances, so
- (ix) **Subtotal**
- Direct cost
 - Contingency Fund – Generally it is taken to be 5 to 10 % of the direct cost.
 - Total Direct Costs – Sum of Direct costs and Contingency funds.

(b) Indirect Costs

This refers to certain expenses which are common to several research projects in an institution such as buildings, equipment, general administration, etc. Twenty percent of the Total Direct Costs may be taken as a general figure, for purposes of

negotiations. However, it clearly depends upon the audit practices of the funding organization.

(c) Grand Total – This is the sum of Direct Cost and Indirect Cost.

(d) Consultations with the Comptroller – Depending upon the nature of research proposal, some heads may potentially entail more expenditure than first estimated. On such aspects, consultations must be sought with the comptroller of the Funding Organization.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What are some of the general features of the cover page in a research proposal?

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2) Prepare a research proposal on a topic of your choice.

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.....

14.5 LET US SUM UP

We discussed what a research proposal is, its significance and the steps involved in preparing a research proposal. We addressed the following questions: What is to be studied? Why it must be studied? How it will be studied? What will form the possible intended outcomes / new understandings / benefits? If these questions are not asked and answered in any research proposal, it is a clear indicator of its infirmity. Hence, it would call for a revision of the research proposal.

14.6 REFERENCES

Mouton, Johann and HC Marxis. 1996. *Basic Concepts in the Methodology of the Social Sciences*. South Africa: HSRC Publishers

14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Research proposals are closely linked to the whole issue of a research project. It may be regarded as something that develops naturally from the process of planning a project. Seen from this point of view, it is not different from the fact that a research proposal is a planning document in

which the researcher indicates what he/she plans to do, and how he/she plans to set about it.

- 2) The proposal is used as a source of information, and serves as the basis upon which decision makers decide whether the project ought to be approved or not and, whether the funds that have been requested are to be granted. It is, therefore, quite clearly of considerable importance that the proposal should convey a favourable impression of the project and of the researcher.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Some general features of the cover page are as follows:
 - (i) Title of the research proposal
 - (ii) Date/ Month and Year of submission
 - (iii) Details of who is submitting the research proposal
 - (iv) Mention of place where the research proposal is being submitted
2. Read the unit carefully and prepare the research proposal.



GLOSSARY

Array	: An array is an arrangement of data in ascending or descending order. It is also called a simple array.
Arithmetic Mean	: Sum of observed values of a set divided by the number of observations in the set is called a mean or an average.
Bar diagram	: It is often defined as a set of thick lines corresponding to various values of the variable. It is different from histogram where width of the rectangle is important.
Continuous Probability Distribution	: It is the probability distribution for a continuous random variable.
Continuous Random Variable	: It is a random variable that can take all values in a certain interval.
Coefficient of Variation	: It is a relative measure of dispersion which is independent of the units of measurement. As opposed to this Standard Deviation is an absolute measure of dispersion.
Continuous frequency distribution	: A continuous frequency distribution is formed where the variable can take any value between two numbers like height and weight, income, temperatures, etc.
Cumulative frequency distribution	: It is obtained by successive totaling of the simple frequencies of a discrete or continuous distributions. This totaling can be done either from above (giving “less-than” cumulative frequency distribution) or from below (giving “more-than” cumulative frequency distribution).
Caption	: It is a part of a table and labels data presented in the column of a table. It is also called <i>box head</i> . It may contain one or more than one column head.
Census Data	: The data obtained by observing all the items of population.
Class and class limits	: It is a decided group of magnitudes having two ends called class limits or <i>class boundaries</i> .
Class range	: Also called <i>class interval</i> is the difference of two limits of a class. It is equal to upper limit minus lower limit. It is also called <i>class width</i> .
Convenience Sampling	: It refers to the method of obtaining a sample that is most conveniently available to the researcher.

Cluster Sampling	: It is a sampling procedure where the entire population is divided into groups called clusters and then a random number of clusters are selected. All observations in the selected clusters are included in the sampling.
Discrete frequency distribution	: A discrete distribution or discrete series is formed where the variable can take only discrete values like 1,2,3,..... Number of children in a family, number of students in a university, etc. are examples of discrete variable.
Discrete Probability Distribution	: It is the probability distribution for a discrete random variable.
Discrete Random Variable	: It is a random variable that either assumes a finite number of values or an infinite sequence (like 1, 2, 3, ...).
Frequency curve	: It is a smoothened graph of a frequency distribution obtained from frequency polygon through free hand tracing in such a way that the area under both of them is approximately the same.
Frequency Distribution	: The arrangement of data in the form of frequency distribution that describes the basic pattern which the data assumes in the mass.
Frequency polygon	: It is a broken line graph to represent a frequency distribution and can be obtained either from a histogram or directly from the distribution.
Gaussian Distribution	: It is the other name for the normal distribution.
Geometric Mean	: It is the mean of n values of a variable computed as the n th root of their product.
Harmonic Mean	: It is the inverse of the arithmetic mean of the reciprocals of the observations of a set
Histogram	: It is a set of adjacent rectangles presented vertically with areas proportional to the frequencies.
Historigram	: The line graph of a time series is called historigram (For example, steel production since 1950).
Inclusive type class interval	: A class interval in which all observations lying between and including the class limits are included.
Judgment Sampling	: In this sampling procedure the selection of sample is based on the researcher's judgment about some appropriate characteristic required of the sample units.

Line graph	: It is the locus of different points obtained with the combinations of X and Y coordinates measured on X-axis and Y-axis respectively.
Multistage Sampling	: The sample selection is done in a number of stages.
Main body of the table	: It is certainly the most important part of the table and contains numerical information about which a hint is already made clear by the title. It is also called <i>field of the table</i> .
Mean Deviation	: It is the arithmetic mean of absolute deviations (i.e., the differences) from mean or median or mode.
Median	: In a set of observations, it is the value of the middlemost item when they are arranged in order of magnitude.
Mid-point	: Also called mid-value, it is the average value of two class limits. It falls just in the middle of a class.
Mode	: In a set of observations, it is the value which occurs with maximum frequency.
Nominal Variable	: Such a variable takes qualitative values and do not have any ordering relationships among them. For example, gender which assumes two qualitative values, male and female has no ordering in 'male' and 'female' status. A nominal variable is also called an attribute.
Normal Distribution	: The best known of all the theoretical probability distributions. It traces out a bell-shaped symmetric probability curve.
Number Ogive	: It is the graph of cumulative frequency. Graph of "less-than" cumulative frequencies gives "less-than" ogive and that of "more-than" gives "more-than" ogive.
Parameter	: It is a measure of some characteristic of the population.
Pictographs	: Here the data are presented in the form of pictures.
Pie diagram	: It is a circle sub-divided into components to present proportion of different constituent parts of a total. It is also called pie chart.
Population	: It is the entire collection of units of a specified type in a given place and at a particular point of time.
Primary Data	: Data obtained by observing the items or individuals under the ambit of a problem under consideration.
Quota Sampling	: In this sampling procedure the samples are selected on the basis of some parameters such as age, gender, geographical region, education, income, religion, etc.

Random Sampling	: It is a procedure where every member of the population has a definite chance or probability of being selected in the sample. It is also called probability sampling.
Range	: It is the difference between the largest and the smallest observations of a given set or data.
Relative frequency distribution	: It is frequency distribution where the frequency of each value is expressed as a <i>fraction</i> or a <i>percentage</i> of the total number of observations.
Simple Random Sampling	: It is the basic sampling procedure when we select samples using lottery method or using random number tables.
Snowball Sampling	: Snowball sampling relies on referrals from initial sampling units to generate additional sampling units.
Stratified Sampling	: In this sampling procedure the population is divided into groups called strata and then the samples are selected from each stratum using a random sampling method.
Systematic Sampling	: A sampling procedure in which units are selected from the population at uniform interval that is measured in time, order or space.
Sample Data	: The data obtained by observing only those items which are included in the sample.
Sample	: It is a sub-set of the population. It can be drawn from the population in a scientific manner by applying the rules of probability so that personal bias is eliminated. Many samples can be drawn from a population and there are many methods of drawing a sample.
Sampling Distribution	: It is the relative frequency or probability distribution of the values of a statistic when the number of samples tends to infinity.
Sampling Error	: The absolute difference between population parameter and relevant sample statistic.
Secondary Data	: Data obtained from the already collected data of some agency.
Simple and sub-divided bar diagram	: In the case of simple bar diagram only one variable can be presented. A sub-divided bar diagram is used to show various components of a phenomenon.
Simple Random Sampling	: This is a sampling procedure, in which, each member of the population has the <i>same chance</i> of being selected in the sample.

Standard Deviation	: It is the positive square root of the variance.
Statistical Inference	: It is the process of concluding about an unknown population from a known sample drawn from it.
Statistical Survey	: It is a method for the collection of data by observing all or a sample of items under the ambit of a given problem.
Statistical Unit	: It is a characteristic or a set of characteristics of an item that are observed to collect data.
Stub	: Also a part of a table, it consists of stub head and stub entries. Each stub entry labels a given data placed in the rows of the table. Both <i>stub head</i> and <i>stub entries</i> appear on the left-hand column of a table. They describe the row heads.
Tabulation	: It is a systematic presentation of data in rows and columns.
Test of Hypothesis	: Testing the validity of a hypothesis on the basis of collected data. The probability of success, p , in a binomial distribution is very small and the number of trials, n , is so large that the expectation, $\mu = np$ is finite.
Variance	: If $E(x)$ is the mathematical expectation of a random variable x , the variance of x is defined as $E [x - E(x)]^2$.
Variance	: It is the arithmetic mean of squares of deviations of observations from their arithmetic mean.
Volume Diagrams	: These are <i>three dimensional</i> diagrams. In their construction length, width and height are used. They consist of boxes, cubes, blocks, spheres and cylinders.