UNIT 1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Contents
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Survey of the Literature
1.3 Steps to Conduct a Literature Review
1.4 Searching for Existing Literature
1.5 Reasons for Writing a Literature Review
1.6 Statement of a Research Problem
1.7 Components in a Research Problem
1.8 Focus of Selection
1.9 Sources of Selecting a Research Problem
1.10 Necessity of Defining a Research Problem
1.11 Techniques Involved in Defining a Research Problem
1.12 Conditions Conducive to Formulation of a Research Problem
1.13 Operationalising Concepts
1.14 Summary
References
Suggested Reading
Sample Questions

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit you will:

➢ know that literature provides help in the form of studies that are closely related and comparable to the study being conducted;

➢ learn that it relates the study to the larger ongoing dialogue in literature about the topic;

➢ be provided with an understanding about the framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as the benchmark for comparing the results with other studies;

➢ learn in totality the introduction to literature review, steps in conducting a literature review and reasons for writing the literature review; and

➢ comprehend the statement of a research problem, components in research problem, techniques involved and conditions conducive to formulation of research problem in detail.
1.1 INTRODUCTION

We start this unit with an introduction about literature review and how it is vital to research work. Literature reviews help researchers limit the scope of their inquiry, and they convey the importance of studying a topic to the researcher. The review of literature is a task that continues throughout the duration of the thesis. Since a thesis aims to be a contribution to knowledge, a careful check should be made that the proposed study has not previously been carried out. Although completely new and original problems are rare, a previous study should not be exactly replicated unless the techniques used had been faulty or line findings and conclusions doubtful or unless some new sources of information had been discovered to throw new light on the problem. A good test is whether the problem still requires solution.

The literature review in a research study accomplishes several purposes. It shares with the researcher the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being reported. It relates a study to the larger ongoing dialogue in the literature about a topic, filling in gaps and extending earlier studies (Creswell, 2003). It provides a frame-work for establishing the importance of the study as well as a benchmark for comparing the results of study with other findings. All or some of these reasons may be the foundation for writing the scholarly literature into a study.

Once a topic has been decided upon, it is essential to review relevant material which has a bearing on the topic. This review of the literature is included in the final written thesis as a key section or chapter. It is necessary to show how the problem under investigation relates to previous research studies. In some subject areas it is important to locate the problem within a theoretical framework and in such cases the underlying theory needs to be reviewed as well.

1.2 SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

One of the simplest ways that we can devise to economise effort in an inquiry is to review and build upon the work already done by others. In exploratory studies, the focus of review is on hypotheses that may serve as leads for further investigation. Hypotheses may have been explicitly stated by previous workers, the task then is to gather various hypotheses that have been put forward, to evaluate their usefulness as a basis for further research, and to consider whether they suggest new hypotheses. More frequently, however, an exploratory study is concerned with an area in which hypotheses have not yet been formulated; the task then is to review the available material with sensitivity to the hypotheses that may be derived from it.

It is useful in initially surveying a field to work from the general to the specific or to work from tertiary and secondary sources of information to primary sources.

Primary sources

Primary sources of information include first-hand accounts of experimentation and investigation (articles in professional journals, monographs, doctoral theses, interviews, and questionnaires), original works (letters, diaries, eyewitness accounts, poems, novels, autobiographies) and reports (proceedings of Parliament, court testimony, reports of governmental departments and agencies, annual reports, minutes).
Secondary sources

Secondary sources of information are summaries of information gathered from primary sources. These include translations, summaries and reviews of research (for example, encyclopedia articles), abstracts, guide books and other publications containing factual information, commentaries and so on.

Tertiary sources

Textbooks are usually examples of tertiary sources of information since these are generally compiled from secondary sources. The reliability of sources of information is generally a function of the number of hands through which the information has passed. Tertiary sources of information can be useful in providing an overview of broad summary of field. They may even be acceptable as references because some textbooks become acknowledged as authoritative. For certain types of research, the original source material may be lost or inaccessible and heavy reliance must therefore be made on secondary sources. However, there is no substitute for consulting primary sources if they are available and postgraduate work in most subject areas demands it (Anderson et al. 1971).

It is important to learn how primary sources are used in qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods of research. In qualitative approach, the investigator or the researcher looks for literature which contain information from the participant’s or the respondent’s perspective and not from the investigator’s. It is found that one of the basic reasons for taking up a qualitative study is because it is exploratory. This also suggests that not much data can be found in literature on the theme or the population being researched and the investigator prefers to gather knowledge based on the ideas and thoughts expressed by the participants.

In qualitative research the literature consulted differs significantly. While working on theoretically focused ethnographies and critical ethnographies, literature based on critical theory and cultural concepts are referred and these are introduced by the researchers at an early stage of fieldwork, i.e. while designing the framework. However in grounded theory studies, where the researcher does not enter the field with a hypothesis, literature does not play an important role in building the initial ground for enquiry.

On the other hand, in quantitative research literature is used substantially before venturing out to the field, so as to give a sense of direction to design research questions and hypotheses. Here literature helps in introducing the problem of study or also to introduce in detail the existing literature connected to the study. This section is usually named ‘related literature’, ‘review of literature” etc. Moreover, literature is also included at the end of the research in order to compare the findings with the existing ones. In quantitative enquiry literature is thus logically used as an outline for research queries and hypotheses.

A separate section on the ‘review of the literature’ deserves special mention because it is a popular form for writing literature into a study. This literature review might take several different forms, and little consensus exists about a preferable form. Cooper (1984) suggests that literature reviews can be integrative, with researchers summarizing broad themes in the literature (cf. Creswell, 2003).
When the researcher uses both or either a qualitative or a quantitative approach in the use of literature then it is called a mixed method study. The literature depends on the kind of mixed methods model/design being used.

1.3 STEPS TO CONDUCT A LITERATURE REVIEW

Regardless of whether the researcher writes the literature into a qualitative, quantitative, or a mixed methods study, several steps are useful in conducting a literature review. A literature review for a proposal or a research study means locating and summarizing the studies about a topic. Often these summaries are research studies (because a researcher is conducting a research study), but they may also include conceptual articles or thought pieces that provide frameworks for thinking about topics. There is not one way to conduct a literature review, but many scholars proceed in a systematic fashion to capture, evaluate, and summarize it.

Step 1: One should begin by identifying key words useful in locating materials in an academic library.

Step 2: With these key words in mind, the researcher should go to the library and begin searching the library catalog for holdings (i.e. journals and books).

Step 3: The researcher should try to locate journal articles and books because they are easy to locate and obtain.

Step 4: Using this initial group of articles he/she should try to identify the article or chapter will make a useful contribution to understanding of the literature.

Step 5: After identifying useful literature, the researcher should begin designing the literature map.

Step 6: At the same time s/he should organise the literature into a literature map and include precise references to the literature using an appropriate style.

Step 7: After summarizing the literature, s/he should assemble the literature review, categorically, thematically and conceptually.

To build on key points in these process steps, the researcher should consider techniques useful in accessing the literature quickly through databases (Creswell, 2003).

1.4 SEARCHING FOR EXISTING LITERATURE

The first thing to do after a researcher gets an idea for a piece of research, is to find out what has been done. In the jargon of library science, a documentation resource is anything that helps the researcher to find literature – published or unpublished. There are three main documentation resources: people, review articles and bibliographic search tools (Bernard, 1995). Usually the researcher knows a few initial references when s/he begins her/his research. The bibliographies in these references will usually provide the researcher with a raft for further relevant references.
Activity

Organise a “Review of the Literature” for a quantitative study and follow the model for delimiting the literature to reflect the variables in the study. As an alternative, organise a review of literature for a qualitative study and include it in an introduction as a rationale for the research problem in the study.

The researcher should start library research with an index or abstract. Many libraries have both print and electronic versions of frequently used indexes. Advantage of print indexes is that they are organised under controlled headings. The headings bring together all material on the subject and typically include cross-references, which can help in identifying related topics. Database now available in libraries provide an opportunity for researchers to access thousands of journals, conference papers, and materials quickly.

Libraries generally group their online indexes by subject. The frequently used indexes in the social sciences are the Sociological Abstracts (SA), Social Sciences Index (SSI), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Annual Review of Anthropology, Science Citation Index (SCI), Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A & HCl), Anthropological Index (AI), Abstracts in Anthropology (AIA), The International Bibliography of Social and Cultural Anthropology (IBSCA), The Catalog of the Peabody Museum, Library and Anthropological Literature (AL), Geographical Abstracts (GA). Many of the documentation resources are available in CD-ROM also.

The electronic version can facilitate a search in several ways. Electronic indexes are more dynamic than print resources, allowing the researcher to search more than one term at a time within a long span of years, and s/he can usually get a printed copy of the citations. It is often possible to save, download, and e-mail an abstract, a citation list, and even entire articles. As with conducting Web searches, the values of these resources depend on the researcher’s ability to identify relevant terms.

Nowadays, online bibliographical databases that are accessible on the internet are an invaluable source of references. For all online databases the researcher shall work out some good keywords that can be entered into the search engines and which will allow the researcher to identify suitable references. The researcher should explore the existing literature to identify the following issues.

- What is already known about this area?
- What concepts and theories are relevant to this area?
- What research methods and research strategies have been employed in studying this area?
- Are there any significant controversies?
- Are there any inconsistencies in findings related to this area?
- Are there any unanswered research questions in this area?

This last issue points to the possibility that the researcher will be able to revise and refine research questions in the process of reviewing the literature (Bryman, 2004).
Now the question arises why does a researcher need to review the existing literature? The most obvious reason is that s/he wants to know what is already known about her/his area of interest so that s/he does not simply ‘reinvent the wheel’. Beyond this, using the existing literature on a topic is a means of development and argument about the significance of research and where it leads.

### 1.5 REASONS FOR WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW

Bryman (2004) mentions the following as a list of reasons for writing a literature review:

- Need to know what is already known in connection with the research area because the researcher does not want to be accused of reinventing the wheel.
- Can learn from other researchers’ mistakes and avoid making the same ones.
- Can learn about different theoretical and methodological approaches in research area.
- Help to develop an analytical framework.
- To consider the inclusion of variables in the research that the researcher might not otherwise have thought about.
- Suggest further research questions.
- Help with the interpretation of her/his research findings.
- Gives research pegs on which to hang research findings.

#### Activity

Develop a visual map of the literature related to the topic. Include in the map the proposed study, and draw lines from the proposed study to other categories of studies so that a reader can easily see how the study will extend existing literature.

### 1.6 STATEMENT OF A RESEARCH PROBLEM

In the research process, the first and foremost step happens to be the selection and proper definition a research problem. We talk of a research problem or hypothesis in case of descriptive or hypothesis testing research studies. Exploratory or formulative research studies do not start with a problem or hypothesis, their problem is to find a problem or the hypothesis to be tested (Kothari, 2004). A researcher must find the problem and formulate it so that it becomes susceptible to research. There may be persons interested in undertaking research, but a question which needs careful consideration is how to select a research problem. It is not easy to select a problem because many considerations weigh in this regard. The most important being, that the problem should be researchable as well as manageable. A researcher might identify the area of her/his general interest but that does not in any way become a problem of
research, for e.g. a student of anthropology might feel interested in tribal studies which could be an area of general interest but out of this s/he will have to pick up a theme of research which is of interest to her/him for her/his study.

Identifying a research problem is indicating a specific area of answering some research questions. A person interested in undertaking research in social sciences will be concerned with selecting the problem which interests him, which appears problematic to him, or which he thinks need to be investigated for better understanding of society. Initially, the researcher may have a diffused notion of particular aspects of the problem to be analysed, but by reading more literature on the subject and by thinking more and more on it, s/he comes to have a fairly clear idea of what the issue is and comes to formulate a specific research problem (Ahuja, 2007). To define a problem correctly, a researcher must know: what a problem is.

1.7 COMPONENTS IN A RESEARCH PROBLEM

A research problem, in general, refers to some difficulty which a researcher experiences in the context of either theoretical or practical and wants to obtain a solution for the same. Usually we say that a research problem does exist if the following conditions are met with:

i) There must be an individual (or a group or an organisation), to whom the problem can be attributed. The individual or the organisation, as the case may be, occupies an environment, which is defined by values of the uncontrolled variables.

ii) There must be at least two courses of action to be pursued. A course of action is defined by one or more values of the controlled variables.

iii) There must be at least two possible outcomes of the course of action, of which one should be preferable to the other. This means that there must be at least one outcome that the researcher wants, i.e., an objective.

iv) The courses of action available must provide some chance of obtaining the objective, but they cannot provide the same chance, otherwise the choice would not matter. In simple words, we can say that the choices must have unequal efficiencies for the desired outcomes.

An individual or a group of persons can be said to have a problem which can be technically described as a researcher problem, if they (individual or the group), having one or more desired outcomes, are confronted with two or more courses of action that have some but not equal efficiency for the desired objective(s) and are in doubt about which course of action is the best (Kothari, 2004).

In every research, there are four components, each having its own interest in research. These four components are: researcher (who conducts the study), research sponsor (who pays for the research), research participant (who replies to questions), and research consumer (who uses the findings of the researcher). The researcher’s interest may be: advancement of knowledge, filling up a gap in knowledge, academic curiosity of some observed phenomenon, problem solving, testing a hypothesis, theory construction, getting status and recognition, getting money, replication of some previous research, and so on. The sponsor’s interests may be: policy framing, programme evaluation, encouraging academic
interests, getting innovative ideas for growth of his concern, solving problem in his establishment, and the like. The participants’ (workers, students, villagers, slum-dwellers, alcoholics, criminals, women, etc.) interests may be: cooperating with the researcher to the extent of finding solution for solving their problems or just understanding society and social phenomena. The research consumer’s (entrepreneurs, government, policy planners, etc.) interests may be: solving a problem, future planning, etc. (Ahuja, 2007).

For a researcher one thing which must be clearly understood before finishing a research proposal is as to who is the consumer of researcher. Such a consumer can be an individual himself, a group of researchers, an industry or a group of industries, etc. Each research consumer has certain objects to achieve through research. It is sure and certain that consumer of research has a problem which he wants to get solved. It is also usually found that he has some alternatives before him and through his research, he will like to find the best. If there is no doubt about something, then there can be no problem as well. All alternatives are linked with efficiency. Research consumer sometimes can also get the research done purely for the sake of collecting information and it is this information which determines relative efficiency of alternatives means. In fact consumer is the most important consideration in formulation of a research proposal. It is the consumer for whom the report is to be finally prepared and consumed. It is again the consumer who will place funds at the disposal of the researcher and if the consumer is society then the problem will be investigated by the state.

According to Merfon (cf. Hans Raj, 1979) there are three important components in the progressive formulation of a problem in social research namely: what one wants to know, why one wants to know and possible answers to questions. In other words first a question arises, and then the why of the question arises, followed by possible answers.

The questions can revolve around such problems e.g. whether the alleged social facts are actually facts or not, and unless that is established and understood, the whole basis will be wrong and everything will go wrong with subsequent findings. It will have to be established that social facts are not what these sometimes appear to be. Sometimes these prove wrong as well. Questions which aim at finding out whether facts, are facts or not are called fact finding questions.

Then another set of questions can be those questions which draw direct attention of the researchers to find out uniformities of relations between classes of social variables. Such types of questions are usually derived from a general theoretical orientation rather than a definite theory. The questions differ both in scope as well as degree of specificity.

There can be questions which can be addressed to a variety of institutional spheres. But each question has its own value in so far as augmenting of knowledge is concerned. These questions originate from different sources and can be thus:

- Descriptive facts;
- Dealing with adequacy of concepts;
- Relating to empirical generalisation;
• Dealing with observed patterns of social organisation and their consequences.

After this comes the rationale of the question i.e. why at all a question is worth putting forward i.e., how the answer to a question is likely to contribute either to theory or practice. In other words it is imperative to find out whether the question is consequential or trivial. It is this rationale which turns out those questions which are considered unimportant or insignificant. Only such questions need be answered which are considered relevant to other ideas and facts in the discipline on the one hand and help people in achieving practical values on the other. Usually such questions help in improving theoretical system. Theoretically a question may also draw attention on certain inconsistencies on commonly accepted ideas or findings and also help in drawing a conclusion whether such inconsistencies are real or seemingly real. These in turn lead to posing new problems for research and also set the stage for instituting new problems. These help in locating deviant cases and when it is uniformly interpreted, helps in improving the rule.

Questions assume a very serious significance and importance when a particular discipline is evolving itself. Then the problems which had hitherto been neglected come to the forefront. Range of problems to be investigated very much increases. New concepts originate and are differentiated from each other.

The questions of a research problem can be both diffused a well as specific. In a diffused form a question may specify the pertinent variables of a class and problem may not be fully instituted (Hans Raj, 1979).

1.8 FOCUS OF SELECTION

Once the research topic is selected, it becomes necessary to select specific aspects for analysis. Four such aspects which need attention are:

Selecting units of analysis

The cases selected for study by the researchers depend on the theme of study and the objectives of research. The units of analysis could be: individuals, groups of people, social structures, social systems, social positions, office holders, organisations, social relationships, etc. For example, for studying cyclones, one has to visit those coastal areas in selected states (like Andhra Pradesh, Orissa) where cyclones are frequent and government has to spend millions of rupees for rehabilitating the victims. Similarly, for studying drug abuse, one may focus on students in schools, colleges, universities or slum dwellers or industrial workers; or truck drivers, rickshaw and auto-rickshaw drivers, or rag-pickers, or villagers in selected areas.

In these examples, it is the purpose of study which dictates what or who is to be studied, i.e., what is to be the appropriate unit of analysis. Identifying units of analysis is difficult when aggregate information is involved and people are scattered in different geographical areas.

Selecting variables

Variables to be analysed in research may vary from case to case because of difference in research questions. Even the research questions may vary from one study to another on the same theme.
Thus, explanatory variables (selected for analysis) have to be identified before undertaking research so that extraneous variables may be ignored/isolated. Similarly, independent variable in one study may be dependent in other study. In relation to specific independent and dependent variables, the antecedent and intervening variables may also be identified in the research. A variable is intervening if it is in effect the independent variable occurs prior in time to both the independent and dependent variables. Thus, efficient research depends upon identifying potentially relevant extraneous variables in order to control as many variables as is feasible.

Selecting anticipated relationship for research

After identifying units of analysis and variables in the problem selected for research, it is equally important to select the specific relationship which are believed to exist among the phenomenon. The research is, therefore focused on testing what particular relationships are anticipated. Research cannot be conducted in a haphazard way in which any variable or relationship may be taken for analysis. Depending on the goals of study, it has to be decided in advance which relationships are to be observed and which ones are to be ignored and how to interpret them. Each analysis must have some guiding orientation. Since all researchers carry expectations about the nature of what is being investigated, it is necessary that anticipated relationship should always be identified.

Stating hypothesis

After selecting the problem of research and anticipating some relationship between certain variables, direct or inverse, the researcher may start his research work either only with a vague notion of the problem or may be motivated to follow some specific direction. Some start with formulating and giving statements of a tentative nature regarding the relationship of phenomenon under study with some specific variables. Whether these are scientifically maintainable or not will depend on the data collected. Testing of hypothesis will provide a definite direction to the research.

1.9 SOURCES OF SELECTING A RESEARCH PROBLEM

The ideas to decide a topic of research and to formulate relevant hypotheses stem from varied sources. These are:

- Research conducted by others. Exposure to professional seminars and conferences also sometimes throws ideas for new research.
- Reviewing literature and getting ideas from books and articles. Questions which either others have posed or which arise in the course of one’s reading could become research questions.
- Experience, i.e., one’s own life experience in professional work or from general life experience.
- Government priorities: Various government organisations also publicise research topics, e.g., Government of India circulates a list of various topics in which it feels the necessity of research.
• Prevalent theories: There are some popular theories (but not scientific ones) prevalent in society. These need to be tested by a variety of specific hypotheses to determine in what context/conditions they may or may not hold. In this way, popular theories as well as scientific theories can give ideas about research problems.

• Imagination: Sometimes, the mass media provides an ever-growing potential source for research problem.

• Some observed phenomenon, e.g., adult child interaction, shop keepers and customer interaction, interaction of members of two parties belonging to two different factions (Ahuja, 2007).

1.10 NECESSITY OF DEFINING A RESEARCH PROBLEM

Defining a research problem properly and clearly is a crucial part of a research study. The research problem should be defined in a systematic manner, giving due weightage to all relating points. A problem clearly stated is a problem half solved. This statement signifies the need for defining a research problem. The problem to be investigated should be defined unambiguously as that will help to discriminate relevant data from the irrelevant ones. A proper definition of research problem will enable the researcher to be on track. Questions like: What data are to be collected? What characteristics of data are relevant and need to be studied? What relations are to be explored? What techniques are to be used for the purpose? and similar other questions crop to in the mind of the researcher who can well plan his strategy and find answers to all such questions only when the research problem has been well defined. Thus, defining a research problem properly is a prerequisite for any study and is a step of the highest importance. In fact, formulation of a problem is often more essential than its solution. It is only on careful detailing the research problem that we can work out the research design and can smoothly carry on all the consequential steps involved while doing research.

1.11 TECHNIQUES INVOLVED IN DEFINING A RESEARCH PROBLEM

Defining a problem involves the task of laying down boundaries within which a researcher shall study the problem with a pre-determined objective in view. How to define a research problem is undoubtedly a difficult task. However, it is a task that must be tackled intelligently to avoid the perplexity encountered in a research operation. The usual approach is that the researcher should himself pose a question and set-up techniques and procedures for throwing light on the question concerned for formulating or defining the research problem. But such an approach generally does not produce definitive results because the question phrased in such a fashion is usually in broad general terms and as such may not be in a form suitable for testing.

i) Statement of the problem in generic terms

To begin with the problem should be described in a generic sense which should be guided by some pragmatic issue or any intellectual interest. For this, the
investigator must engage herself/himself meticulously in the subject so that a problem may be rationally posed. For this, a preliminary pilot study or a pilot survey is of much help by which some observation of the field situation can be done. Once this is done, the investigator can state the problem to be studied. At this stage he can also take the help of the research guide/ supervisor to create the research problem. Mostly the guide states the problem in general terms. From this the investigator may narrow down the problem to a specific theme which can be operational. Sometimes when a researcher is working for an organisation, then according to the mandate of the authority, the problem can be specified accordingly. An ambiguity that arises when the problem remains general can be resolved by rationalising over the problem. Finally the viability of a specific answer should be taken into view while stating a problem.

ii) **Understanding the nature of the problem**

To contemplate upon the problem at hand it is best to discuss it with those who first came up with the problem to understand its objectives. If the investigator designed the problem herself/himself, then s/he should again reflect about the points which encouraged her/him to propose a general statement related to the problem. To understand the nature of the problem better, the researcher should deliberate with experts who possess good knowledge about the problem. Moreover the researcher should also find out if the problem to be studied is suitable to the environment in which s/he plans to conduct research.

iii) **Surveying the available literature**

It is pertinent to go through all available literature connected to the problem before the research problem is defined. The investigator should be well aware of the existing theories which can be used in the field and are found in reports, records and any other literature. Before getting down to her/his own problem, s/he should invest enough time to examine earlier research on related problems. This helps in finding out data for future operational purposes. Knowledge of available data helps in narrowing down the problem. This furthers the selection of techniques to be used. This also helps to know if there are inconsistencies in the theories, if the relevant existing theories to the problem under study have gaps with each other or whether these theories are not in sync with future theoretical anticipations. These concerns allow the researcher to progress in the enrichment of knowledge. Thus inquiry of existing and connected problems helps in signifying the kind of issues that may be faced in the study proposed along with shortcomings of the analytical kind. Sometimes such studies also imply beneficial and also new lines of methodology to the researcher’s own problem.

iv) **Developing the ideas through discussions**

Discussion concerning any problem, with her/his colleagues and others who have enough experience in the same area or in working on similar problems, often produces useful information. Various new ideas can be developed through such exercises. This is also known as an experience survey. People with rich experience are in a position to enlighten the researcher on different aspects of his proposed study and their advice and comments are usually invaluable to the researcher.

v) **Rephrasing the research problem**

Lastly the researcher should rearticulate the research problem into functional
plan. After all the above discussed points are taken into consideration, then formulation of an operational proposition is not a tough task. Rephrasing assists in the development of useful hypotheses.

In addition to what has been stated above, the following points should also be observed while defining a research problem:

a) Technical terms and words or phrases, with special meanings used in the statement of the problem, should be clearly defined.

b) Basic assumptions or postulates, if any, relating to the research problem should be clearly stated.

c) A straightforward statement of the value of the investigation (i.e., the criteria for the selection of the problem) should be provided.

d) The suitability of the time-period and the sources of data available should also be considered by the researcher in defining the problem.

e) The scope of the investigation or the limits within which the problem is to be studied should be mentioned explicitly in defining a research problem (Kothari, 2004).

1.12 CONDITIONS CONducIVE TO FORMULATION OF A RESEARCH PROBLEM

Of course it is difficult to lay down any specific conditions conducive to the formulation of a research problem but some such important conditions are:

- The researcher must be well aware of the area in which s/he is going to research.

- S/he should be well conversant with different theories in the field.

- S/he should have full knowledge of the findings of the studies of others in the field and also the reports and available records. S/he should equally be aware of inconsistent theories and abridged gaps.

- S/he should seek enlightenment from experienced persons including administrators, researchers and others.

- Another conducive factor is that the researcher should have a critical, curious and an imaginative frame of mind.

A critical unbiased mind with the desire to answer ‘why’ and ‘how’ of a problem, can be conducive to the formulation of a research problem (Hans Raj, 1979).

Operationalsing concepts

Once the problem is selected and conceptualised, it is to be followed by the operationalisation process. Conceptualisation and operationalisation are intimately linked. Conceptualisation is the refinement and specification of abstract concepts and operationalisation is precisely defining what is meant by the concept. This may involve breaking it down into sub-concepts, termed components (as done with alienation) or establishing concretely measurable characteristics or indicators of the concept, e.g., indicators of ‘inequality’ like income, health, education, etc.
Clarifying the problem means specifying the areas to be selected for observations/study. For example, when we have to study “role of media on health”, the two concepts which need to be operationalised here are: media and health.

Thus, the operationalising concept exhibits to what extent the researcher is willing to combine measurable attributes in fairly gross categories. Operationalisation also includes factors like determining range of variation, etc. In operationalising concepts, ‘content’ may be given greater importance than ‘criteria’. For example, absenteeism may be operationalised as “habitually staying away from the place of work without prior sanction of leave” or “failure to be present for regular duty without good reason” (Ahuja, 2007).

1.13 OPERATIONALISING CONCEPTS

There is a difference between organisational and individual research. When we talk of organisational research it refers to large scale research work in which some information is collected for the purpose of promoting knowledge or for the sake of promoting organisational interests by collecting information for others. Usually in organisational research it is implied that vast resources shall be available. On the other hand when we talk of individual, we mean a type of research in which an individual is interested in the problems which s/he wants to research. It is her/his inner and internal urge which compels her/him to study the problem. It is again for her/him to ensure that the resources will be available for her/his research. But in individual research no vast resources are expected to be utilised. The problem to be researched is expected to be comparatively simpler.

Determinants of individual research

The factors which determine individual research are primarily subject, investigator and coverage.

Subject: Selection of research problem is in no way easy in the case of individual research. While selecting a problem, some basic factors to be taken care of are:

a) The researcher shall always have to see that the problem has a purpose.

b) Another factor which counts in individual research is whether it is practicable to study the problem, collect data and get it analysed in a systematic way. From the practicability viewpoint it shall have to be seen whether the society in general and the people of the area in which research is to be conducted, shall be prepared to divulge the sort of information desired to be collected.

c) Since in individual research both financial and manual resources are very limited, therefore, it is in the interests of the individual that he should pick up such a problem which has contemporary social importance.

d) A researchable problem for an individual can be either factual or policy problem. It is always better, at least in the beginning of the research, that only such a subject should be picked up which are more factual in character rather than those with philosophical assets.

e) Still another determinant can be that the individual should pick up only such problems, results of which can be verified, rather than the one where
the results cannot be verified and subjected to criticism. Though in socio-economic research usually it is difficult to verify the results, yet it is desirable that only such problems which are verifiable are picked up.

The investigator: Howsoever good a problem it might be, it cannot be successfully researched, particularly in the case of individual research, until and unless the investigator is particularly good. An individual is to research a problem and success of the problem of research will ultimately depend on her/his experience, resources and technical ability.

Coverage: It is always desirable in the case of individual research that only limited area should be covered and there should be concentration on problem of research. It is only then that in depth study will be possible. It will also then be possible to integrate some enquiries with the help of good investigators.

Starting point of a research problem: Of course, it is not easy to select a research problem for a study but once the problem has been selected a question arises as to how to start and when. It is better that before a starting is made, there should be careful planning about succeeding stages. There should be clear ideas of broad perspectives and general view of the problem as a whole. To be clear it is better if essential plan of approach is clearly put down in writing and the tentative plan is chalked out. It is at this state that real objective of the enquiry is determined and statement of the problem in its true perspective understood. It is thereafter essential that time and energy in the collection of data can be saved. There should be precise but clear definition of the problem and it is better if proper splitting of the problem is done in order of their importance and relationship with the main problem. A clear idea should be gathered of the factors which are likely to influence the study.

There should also be a clear idea about the procedure of work and it should be related to time and cost factors. The guiding principles in planning the procedure can be as follows:

- Type of investigation should be clearly determined i.e. how the facts should be collected. Some projects are of experimental nature while others are of bibliographical, while still other projects deal with personal enquiries and others are based on participant observation. But in so far as planning procedure is concerned, in all the cases it is essential that it should be decided how extensive the study would be, whether the enquiry will be elaborate or partial and what the urgency of that problem is.

- Then it should be clearly understood at this stage as to what the problem itself requires in relation to the present project to the work done by others and needs and desires of the subject sponsors.

- No doubt while starting work, experience should be given due consideration but giving too much weight to that is bound to influence the study and its conclusions, therefore, resources should be better guided for starting a problem (Hans Raj, 1979).

1.14 SUMMARY

Let us summarize what we have learnt here about both literature review and statement of a research problem. In literature review, before searching the literature, identify the topic using such strategies as drafting a brief title or
stating the central research question is to be addressed. The researcher should also consider whether this topic can and should be researched by reviewing whether there is access to participants and resources and whether the topic will add to social science knowledge, be of interest to others, and be consistent with personal goals.

Researchers use the scholarly literature in a study to present results of similar studies, or relate the present study to the ongoing dialogue in the literature, and to provide a framework for comparing results of a study with other studies. For qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs, the literature serves different purposes. In qualitative research, literature helps substantiate the research problem, but it does not constrain the views of the participants. A popular approach is to include more literature at the end of a qualitative study than at the beginning. In quantitative research, literature not only helps to substantiate the problem but also suggests possible questions or hypotheses that need to be addressed. A separate ‘literature review’ section is typically found in quantitative studies. In mixed methods research, the use of literature will depend on the type of strategy of inquiry and the weight given to qualitative or quantitative research in the study.

When conducting a literature review, at first the researcher should identify key words for searching the literature, and then search the library resource, relying on computerised databases in the library and for fields of study. One can then locate articles or books based on a priority of searching first for journal articles and then books. After this, identifying references helps to make a contribution to literature review. One should group these studies into a literature map that shows the major categories of studies and positions.

To summarize the basic notes of a research problem, we can conclude by saying that the task of defining a research problem, very often, follows a sequential pattern – the problem is stated in a general way, the ambiguities are resolved, thinking and rethinking process results in a more specific formulation for the problem so that it may be a realistic one in terms of the available data and is also analytically meaningful. All this results in a well defined research problem that is not only meaningful from an operational point of view, but is equally capable of paving the way for the development of a working hypotheses and for means of solving the problem itself.

It may, thus, be said that the selection of the research problem has three main components: determining the core area of research, identifying the range of alternatives from which choices are made, and the context in which these choices are made, i.e., the factors that influence the choices.

References


**Suggested Reading**


**Sample Questions**

1) Write a brief note on importance of review of literature.

2) What are the steps involved in conducting a review of literature.

3) Write a review of literature on a topic of your interest from various journals and books available.

4) How is a research problem defined? Describe the techniques in defining it.

5) How is a research problem formulated and designed? Describe in detail.