

THEORITICAL ASPECT OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL

- Uma Nath Baral

"All progress is born of inquiry. Doubt is often better than overconfidence, for it leads to inquiry and inquiry leads to invention"

- Hudson Maxim.

Inquiry in the academic field usually means research, which is purposeful and successful activity. The progress that has been made in our society is the contribution of research. Research is a very important means to enhance human knowledge. Human civilization has come into this developed stage. Mainly because of the knowledge gained through research. Such knowledge will contribute a lot in the development of a political system and a nation. The finding of research are of substantial value for planners, policy makers, administrators, political parties and other concerned authorities and institutions. It provides essential information while formulating policies and implementing them. Therefore, it is said that the whole progress depends on research. There is no argument that the role of research is important in adding new things to human life and the society as a whole.

Research is a systematic and empirical observation to get new facts and varifying the existing knowledge or theory. It is usually considered a scientific work itself. Hence the term research and scientific method are often used synonymously particularly begining of the behavioural movement in political science. Research is considered to be the more formal, systematic and intensive process of carrying a scientific method of analysis. Scientific method in problem solving may be an informal application of problem identification, hypothesis formulation, observation analysis and conclusion (Best, 1983: 18). Research that involves scientific analysis results in the formulation of new theories, discovery of new techniques and modification of existing concepts, theories and techniques. While conducting research one may develop hypothesis and test it. One may also establish relationships between variables and identify the ways and means for problem solving. Following are the basic steps in scientific research.

1. Selection and formulation of the problem.
2. Formulation of hypothesis.
3. Decision about research design and methods.
4. Data-Collection.
5. Classification and Tabulation of data.
6. Interpretation and Generalization.
7. Report Writing.

Research is simply a process of arriving at dependable solution to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Research involves scientific analysis that would result in the formulation of new theories, discovery of new techniques, modification of old concepts or knocking off an existing theory, concept or technique. It is very important tool for advancing knowledge for promoting progress and enabling people to relate more effectively to their environment, to accomplish their purpose and to resolve their conflicts. Although it is not the only way. It is certainly one of the most effective scientific ways of solving problems.

Since all post graduate students today have some research experience at T.U., they may be in writing theses or term papers, they must be familiar with research methodology. Yet many students find writing thesis a difficult and nerve-wracking experience. The University or Campus does not offer adequate courses on research methods, consequently the students do not have sufficient knowledge about designing a research proposal and the process of writing thesis. In view of the field of research I shall not propose any specific method of research proposal. The main concern in this article is to describe the general format of a research proposal and explain some terminology regarding the research process, in Political Science as well as in other Social Sciences.

What is a Research Proposal ?

A research proposal is a basic and preliminary part of any research work. It is a plan, design, structure or a eyewindo of proposed research. The research proposal is a very significant step for the preliminary information before the research work is carried out. It helps the institutions as well as the researcher himself for better knowledge while carrying it out in practice. So many institutions require a proposal for submission before any project is approved. The research proposal is like an architecture which is designed before the building is constructed. It is necessary to submit the research proposal to get through a certain level or degree before conducting the research work under the project work of various institutions.

A research proposal provides the bases to the researcher for the systematic directives. Moreover, it helps to evaluate the project and the arrangements of its directives. The main use of the research proposal is to try to get the approval so that the research work can proceed. Therefore, the reserch work is commenced after the approval of the reserch proposal.

A research proposal is a blueprint that helps to carryout the research work in a systematic way. It tells about the nature of a research project and determines its method. It shows the way for the fulfilment of the project. Moreover, it gives the information about the type of

investment and timing of the project. A research proposal is a kind of schedule which is regular, systematic and scientific. It makes the researcher to abide by the rules and it can be corrected and changed by following the advice of the director.

The research work should be conducted in a careful and well arranged way. A research proposal should not be prepared in a haphazard way. It requires a suitable format and there should be the clear conclusion and generalisation. Research project should be analysed by following the facts and its ideals. It is said that half way of the research work is already completed if the research proposal is well prepared. The preparation of a research proposal is a very serious and important work. Its significance is obvious since its clearly arranged in the first chapter. The format presented, below is the general guideline for the students of master's degree specially for thesis writing. It is not the only format for all. Different institutions can also provide the formats of their own.

Research format

1. Title
2. Statement of the Problem
3. Purpose of the Study
4. Review of the Literature
5. Objective of the Study
6. Significance of the Study
7. Hypothesis
8. Methodology
9. Limitation of the Study
10. Organization of the study (Chapter Plan)
11. Timing and Budgeting
12. Bibliography

1. Title

The first and the main task of research work is the selection of its area. So the area for carrying it out should be selected first. Research once the area is selected work is commenced. If the research area is very broad and extensive. It may lead to confusion. Hence it should be narrowed down so that the research work can be carried out comfortably. That is why the selection of an area is an inevitable part of research.. One specific area should be selected for research work run by the project. A subjectwise area should be fixed whole conducting research in a Campus or University. There can be many titles under the subject.

After selecting the research area, a title should be chosen because there can be a number of problems in the research area. If a specific problem is selected from among the various problems, it is called a

title. The title of any research work :

- (i) Should be as brief as possible,
- (ii) Should be as precise as possible and
- (iii) Should project the scope of the problem in generalised terms.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research proposal should be clearly written. The study problem should be clearly identified by stating its setting or environment and the need for the study. The research proposal is written, either to get through the academic level i.e., M.A. or Ph.D. or to complete any project work.

In fact, the students of M.A., conduct the research work in the name of thesis writing for the fulfilment of a requirement to complete the master's degree.

3. Statement of the Problem

The first and foremost step in research happens to be selecting and properly defining a research problem (Kothari, 1994:30). Main problems or questions and their probable solutions or answers under the set research title are called the statement of the problem/research problem. The questions presented as the statement of the problem show the way of solution and it is the beginning of the research procedure. Statement of the problem is treated as guiding idea. Without some guiding idea, we do not know the right track and what facts and data to rather. Research design is strategic and it conceives the procedure to obtain answer to questions regarding research problems. The statement of the problem should concentrate on the purpose of research work. There are three components in the formulation of a problem in research (Merton, 1968:X): first a question arises or what one wants to know, then the question of why arises or why one wants to know, lastly possible answers to questions.

The statement of a problem is actually the outline or structure of research. Just as building a house involves the construction of strong foundation, a research procedure begins with a problem an investigator intends to probe (Pandey, 1993:20). A good research problem demands an adequate data and fact based on which scientific questions can be raised. A problem in research is an interrogative sentence or statement that asks, what relation exists between two or more variables? The answer is what is being sought in the research. If the problem is a scientific one, it will almost always contain two or more variables. There are three criteria (Kerlinger, 1983:17-18) of selecting problems and problem statements : (i) The problem should express a relation between two or more variables, (ii) The problem should be stated clearly and unambiguously in question form and (iii) It demands that the problem and the problem statement should be such as to imply possibilities of empirical testing. A problem that does not contain implication for testing

its stated relation is not a scientific problem.

We may now list some of the conditions that experience has proved to be conducive to formulation of significant research problems :

- (i) Systematic immersion in the subject through first hand observation.
- (ii) Study of relevant literature on the subject title.
- (iii) Discussion with persons with practical experience in the field of study.

There is no standard form for the presentation of a problem. The problem, however, should not be too general. If it is too broad, it becomes vague and cannot be tested and becomes significantly useless. Conversely, the problem selected must not be too narrow that it becomes artificial. If the problem is stated in such a way that both researcher and the responses know precisely what is to be investigated and how this is to be accomplished it becomes an important part of the process. Any problem should serve as a guide in planning the study and interpreting its results.

Thus, it is essential that the problem is stated in precise terms. Only then the statement of the problem can give direction to the collection of data and to the manner in which they must be processed in order to provide the required answer. While dealing with the statement of the problem, it should be clearly situated in terms of the background and development within the scope of the proposal.

4. Review of the Literature

While conducting research on the stated problem or title, it is essential to know what sort of research studies were carried out previously and which ones were left behind. One should justify why the proposed research title should be carried out. One should find out if there is either lack of study or insufficient studies have been conducted in the proposed area of research.

The survey of literature is a crucial aspect of planning the study and the time spent in such a survey invariably is a wise investment. The review of literature is an exacting task, calling for a deep insight and clear perspective of the overall field. The main purpose of literature review is to find out what works have been done in the area of the research topic and what has not been done in the fields of the research problem being undertaken. A literature review should be undertaken near the outset of a research effort if for no other reason than to make sure that your research is not exactly duplicating someone else's. All sound research involves reviewing what has been written or done about a research topic. According to Johnson and Joslyn (Johnson and Joslyn, 1989 : 121-122) among the reasons for such a review are : (i) to develop general explanations for observed variations in a behaviour phenomenon, (ii) to identify potential researchable hypotheses, (iii) to learn how others have defined and measured key concepts, (iv) to identify data sources that others researchers have used, (v) to develop alternative

research design and (vi) to discover how a research project is related to the work of others.

Besides these, there are several other benefits of literature review in research. It is a significant step which helps to minimize the risk of deadends and choice of rejected studies and methods, promotes a greater understanding of the problem and its crucial aspects and ensures the avoidance of unnecessary duplication. Literature review provides comparative data on the basis of which one can evaluate and interpret the significance of one's findings (research division, 3) It is also a fruitful source of hypothesis as it agitates the mind of the researcher when he comes across problems and hypothesis.

A conduct a literature review depends on the main purpose of the review and the stage of the development of the research title. If there is not a specific hypothesis testing and starting with only a general interest in a problem depending on the library or documentary method covering the subject read the appropriate section and then checkout the sources cited in the footnotes. A perusal of the subject card catalog available in the library will also help to identify related methods that broadly address the research title. From there one can begin to develop and refine a more specific research question. Within a literature search includes anythings published or unpublished on the research title in professional journals, magazines, books, newspapers, governmental publication and documents, previous research works and conference proceedings. All references consulted should be cited as footnotes with technically uniformity.

A review of related literature, however, is an inherent part of the conduct of research, helping the researcher in the classification of his problem and the avoidance of duplication, the formulation of logical hypothesis, the planning of an adequate research design and the rigorous and insightful interpretation of findings.

5. Objective of the Study

Objectives are the guidelines for conducting research work, therefore it should be stated clearly. The main objective of research is to seek the solution or answer to the questions concerning the statement of the problem. The researcher will spell out the objectives of the present study in the form of statement and point out in a simple and brief way what sort of work he is seeking. In research, there are two types of objectives-general and specific. General objectives describe the expected results of research and it helps the researcher to relate the different assess of the proposed research. The general objectives of research are felt desirable. Within each general objective, specific sub-objectives must be framed in a logical sequence of the statement of the problem. Specific objectives are also termed as immediate objectives that are directly related to the research problem. They should be precisely identified in

terms of variables and parameters under study and formulated in the manner of questions.

6. Significance of the Study

Research is the outcome achieved by devoting time, labour and money. The value of study should be stated on theoretical and practical basis and the interested persons and institutions should be clearly informed about its significance. After carrying out the research work, the researcher should provide the information about either on the practical or theoretical basis, how important its finding is for the interested persons and concerned institutions. The purpose of research work should be either to obtain new knowledge or to conduct in depth study of the existing knowledge.

7. Hypothesis

Hypothesis is an explicit statement that indicates how a researcher thinks the phenomena of interest are related. Given the conceptual framework and the specification of dimensions, the specific questions to be answered through the proposed research should be sharply formulated. In the research work specification of variables and positing of relationship among them through specific hypothesis must form a part of the research proposal.

In research, each investigator is to start with certain assumptions and presumptions, which his subsequent study might prove and disapprove. It is a hypothesis round which study revolves and for which data is collected (Raj, 1994: 40). A hypothesis can be considered a tentative generalisation about the problem under investigation. In other words, a hypothesis may be defined as a proposition worded so that its truthness can be verified by empirical observations (Benson, 1969: 3). It is an assumption or proposition whose tenability is to be tested on the basis of the compatability of its implications with empirical evidence and with previous knowledge.

The research problem becomes scientific when supported by a hypothesis. It is assumed that the approach to research is of higher order and analytical when the level of inquiry moves from simple focus on problem to formulation of hypothesis or theories. This is because, to reiterate, hypotheses are tools of analysis which establish operational relations of variables (Pandey, 1993: 20). They are conjectural statements of the relations of variables under following conditions (Kerlinger, 1983 : P. 18-22) : (a) it is in a declarative form, (b) the relation between variables is shown, and (c) it has scope for testing.

Hypothesis is usually framed depending on one or more of the following sources (Chandra, 1989: 76) :

- (i) facts established by previous research in the related areas,
- (ii) through the researcher's experience and observation, and
- (iii) through the researcher's reasoning, insight and logical derivation

from a theory.

For any reason, if the researcher cannot make use of any of the above sources to frame a hypothesis, he will have to resort to 'Null hypothesis'. There are four different types of hypothesis depending upon what the researcher is willing to propose about the relationship between the variables. Null, co-relative, directional and causal hypothesis (Johnson and Joslyn, 1989 : 43-46).

- (a) A null hypothesis is simply a hypothesis that states that there is no relationship between two variables.
- (b) A corelative hypothesis states that there is a relationship between two variables.
- (c) In the directional hypothesis, the researcher makes a guess about the direction of the relationship between variables.
- (d) A causal hypothesis makes the boldest claim about the relationship between two or more variables.

Hypothesis is the most powerful tool through which man has invented a means to achieve the dependable knowledge. Hypotheses are important and indispensable tools of scientific research. There are three main reasons (Kerlinger, 1983: 20-21) for this belief, first the hypothesis are working instruments of theory. Second hypothesis can be tested and shown to be probably true or propably false. Third, hypothesis are powerful tools for the advancement of knowledge because they enable man to get outside himself.

Hypothesis is the pivot of the whole study. Without well formulated hypothesis, the whole study will be out of focus and it will be difficult to draw right and proper conclusions. Though hypothesis occupies a significant place in research, they are perhaps less crucial in studies in which the task is one of determining the status of a given phenomenon. Although the investigator in such studies is likely to need some tentative hypothesis to guide him to the areas with exploring. Actually, hypotheses are not essential in the early stages of exploratory type of research.

A hypothesis, however, helps a researcher in proceeding further and finding solution to the problem he wants to study. Without hypothesis there can be no effective going ahead. It is with clear hypothesis that one comes to know of the scope of the study nature of data to be collected and the one to be discarded. In fact, hypothesis provides a necessary link between theory and investigation, which will to the existing knowledge.

8. Methodology

It is the most important part of any research proposal. First of all a researcher should decide the type of research design to be used. It includes the methods to be used to gather and analyze the data. It also methods questions like how research objectives will be reached and how the problems encountered in research will be handled. Then the

data and other facts relating to the problem and hypothesis of research study should be clearly shown in the proposal from which and how they are collected. It should correspond to the order in which each of the objectives listed are to be attacked in-term of essential hypothesis to be used. It is also shown how and which data are to be generated and processed from, what methods of analysis should be used and what assumptions are being made to effect the enquiry (research division, 4). Following aspects should be clearly mentioned most of the research proposal.

(a) **Methods of Data Collection** : The different types of data that are proposed to be gathered should be specifically mentioned, along with the explanation of the basic design of the nonexperimental or experimental study. The sources for each type of data and the tests and techniques that will be used for collecting different types of data should be specified. Whether the data is to be collected from primary or secondary sources has to be clearly stated. The use of secondary sources, interview, questionnar, observation, field work, which are relevant to the nature of the study, are to be included.

(b) **Sampling** : Researcher should state the estimated total size of population in the study. The method of sampling to be used should be included in the proposal. It is essential to explain whether the study will be based on census or sampling method. Almost no researcher can study the entire population or censuses and hence selects a few individuals belonging to a population for the purpose of his research work. These selected individuals form a sample and while selecting these individuals the researcher should consider the following things (Chandra, 1989: 77) :

(i) The researcher should define population in operational terms, describing it with all the necessary identifiable characteristics. This helps the researcher in selecting the sample depicting the same characteristics with more ease and further helps the researcher in generalising his findings of the present research with more authenticity.

(ii) The researcher should specify the sample size depending on the nature of research. For example, the sample size in experimental type of research is small compared to descriptive type of research. Sample size is usually fixed by estimating the reliability of statistics calculated from the data collected from different sizes of the samples.

(iii) When a sample is selected, it is assumed that it represents the population. So the researcher should use his ingenuity in selecting the appropriate technique of sample selection random, stratified or quota, incidental, purposive, multistage etc.

(c) **Analysis of Data** : The researcher should be subjected to appropriate method of analysis, depending on the nature of the data and the information required by the problems and hypothesis. The

method of data analysis and interpretation may be descriptive or qualitative and statistical or quantitative. In other words analysis of data and the statistical procedures and tests to be made ensure relevance of the conclusion's of the proposed study. As such, the methods to be adopted indicating the level of analysis and testing need to be clearly indicated. Statistics has contributed much to enrich quantitative analysis of data enhancing power of predictability over certain kinds of social behaviour in research. Complete planning of analysis in advance is not always possible or even desirable, new ideas occur to researcher as he collects the data. (Chandra, 1989: 79). But, except in exploratory research, it is always possible and desirable to work out in advance the basic outlines of the analysis of data and information.

9. Limitation of the Study

Research is not free from its limitations. Basically thesis writing is very limited due to lack of time, investment and nature of the study. Since it is not possible to cover all the aspects of problem, that is being studied one needs to specify what aspects are being covered. Otherwise it creates confusion and vague. Thus in research proposal it should be mentioned basic areas as a limitation of the study to where the researcher will include for his research work.

10. Organization of the Study (Chapter Plan)

To proceed the research work in a systematic way, should be divided into different chapters in a research proposal. Chapter plan should indicate the total number of chapters, titles of chapter, including sub-heads, pages etc. Even though it is not possible to write. The blue print in fixed chapters in a research proposal, they should be indicated in probable chapters and pages. In other words, one cannot make a fixed plan. Therefore researcher can reorganise the whole chapter while he writes a thesis or a report.

11. Timing and Budgeting

Timing and budgeting should be clearly mentioned in the research proposal conducted under the institutions and projects. Research should be clearly scheduled in working week or months to different phases of the research work. It should be able to provide the monitoring authorities with close estimates of the entire project time. Likewise a detailed and itemized budget showing how the funds are to be spent is essential. The presentation of budget for the proposed work may be made under the following main categories. The allocation of time and money following various items of budget estimates should be reasonably furnished. Actually, timing and budgeting estimates are not required in the proposal which is done for academic purpose i.e. thesis writing. It will be better if the researcher has to give an outline of his research

schedule. For this purpose the research work should be broken up in various stages and the time required for the completion of each stage of work should be specified. For example, if the research is to be completed within 5 months, the time frame can be decided into the following stages.

Scheduling the research work.

| | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|---------|
| 1) | Preparatory Work | 1 week |
| 2) | Literature Survey | 1 month |
| 3) | Tool Construction | 1 week |
| 4) | Field Study/Data Collection | 1 month |
| 5) | Classification and Tabulation of Data | 2 weeks |
| 6) | Analysis and interpretation of data | 1 month |
| 7) | Report/Thesis Writing | 1 month |

12. Bibliography

While preparing the research proposal, assistance can be taken from different sources like books, journals, articles, newspapers, previous research works and other related documents. The writer's names should be mentioned in the alphabetical order along with their research at the end of the research proposal. Thus, bibliography for a written assignment is an alphabetical list of all source material to which reference has been made. There are different ways of reporting the bibliography. A researcher can select any method whatever he likes, but he should follow the same procedure throughout the research. The essential information required for all references are :

- (i) Author's Surname initials,
- (ii) The name of the book, journal, article or other documents.
- (iii) The imprint (publisher, place of publication and date of publication).

In compiling a bibliography, the researcher may wish to subdivide the sources he has consulted in a number of ways. Like the researcher may wish to subdivide primary and secondary sources or texts and journal articles. While giving the description of the bibliography, only the materials used in it or review of literature should be mentioned. It is not wise enough to mention the irrelevant materials to lengthen its list.

Conclusions

The research of political science and other social science is characterised by a diversity of theoretical perspectives, methodological strategy, data collection and interpretation techniques. Therefore it is not possible to mention in this short article all the possible ways in which a research proposal can be developed. Yet, there are certain features that are common to all research proposals. These types of features are - (i) Problem of Statement, (ii) Major substantive components depending on the nature of proposed research, (iii) Sources and method of data collection (iv) Data analysis and interpretation.

Research proposal, however, is a structure which has its own components. The format of a research proposal carried out by institutions (GO, NGO, INGO etc.) can be different from the departments of a Campus or University, because the nature of research process and the subjects are not the same. The university students do it to obtain master's and Ph.D. degree. Although a University does not seek to provide a degree through the completion of such a research courses, it seeks to provide the ultimate knowledge to the seeker who then becomes a qualified citizen to serve the society and the nation.

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