# Lecture 3

# Defining and Refining the Problem

## Research Methods in Economics (ECON-438)
## MSc Economics, 4th

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# Overview

1. Recap and learning objectives
2. Preliminary research
3. Defining the problem statement
4. Conclusion
5. Suggested readings

# Recap

- Lecture 2 of this module was primarily focused on:
  - explaining the meanings of scientific investigation and giving examples of both scientific and nonscientific investigations.
  - discussing the seven steps of the hypothetico-deductive method by using relevant examples.
  - and noting the alternative perspectives on what makes good research.

# Learning Objectives

After completing Lecture 3 the students should be able to:

- identify problem areas that are likely to be studied in economics.
- narrow down a broad problem into a feasible topic for research using preliminary research.
- develop a good problem statement.

# Research Problem

Research begins with a problem.

- A "problem" means that something is wrong with a situation that needs rectification.
- A "problem" can be defined as any situation where a gap exists between an actual and a desired ideal state.
- A "problem" could also indicate that something is seriously wrong with a current situation or it could indicate an interest in an issue where finding the right answers might help to improve an existing situation.

# Research Problem (Cont'd)

Broad problems have to be transformed into a researchable topic for investigation.

**3 Steps**

- Identification of the broad economic problem.
- Preliminary research (i.e., preliminary information gathering).[a]
- Definition of the research problem (after narrow down).

[a] E.g., a first review of the literature.

# Preliminary Research

Preliminary research helps the researcher to gain a better understanding of the problem and to narrow the problem down to a researchable topic for study.

It helps the researcher to find answers to questions such as:

- "What is the problem?"
- "Why does the problem exist?"
- "Is the problem important?"
- "What are the benefits of solving the problem?"

# Preliminary Research (Cont'd)

Preliminary research helps the researcher to gain a better understanding of the problem and to narrow the problem down to a researchable topic for study.

- Contextual factors.
- Information on the topic of interest.

# Contextual Factors

- Background information and knowledge
- Information gathered on relevant contextual factors will be useful in formulating the broader research problem and raising the appropriate issue related to the problem.
- An understanding of the contextual factors will be helpful in arriving at a precise problem formulation.

# Contextual Factors (Cont'd)

**Primary vs. Secondary Data**

- Data gathered through existing sources are called secondary data.
- It is the data that have been collected by others for another purpose than the purpose of the study in question.

# Contextual Factors (Cont'd)

## Primary vs. Secondary Data

- The data that the researcher gathers first hand for the specific purpose of the study are called primary data.
- Primary data is best obtained by methods such as interviewing people, observation, or by administering questionnaires to individuals.

# Information on the Topic of Interest

- The literature – the body of knowledge available to you as a researcher – may also help to think about and/or better understand the problem.
- A careful review of textbooks, journal articles, conference proceedings, and other published and unpublished materials ensures a thorough awareness and understanding of current work and viewpoints on subject area.

# Information on the Topic of Interest (Cont'd)

- It helps to structure the research on work already done and to develop the problem statement with precision and clarity.

# Defining the Problem Statement

- No amount of good research can find solutions to the situation if the critical issue or the problem to be studied is not clearly pinpointed.
- It is critical that the problem statement is unambiguous, specific, and focused, and that the problem is addressed from a specific academic perspective.
- A good problem statement includes both a statement of the research objective(s) and the research question(s).

# Summary of Today's Session

- In today's session, I have tried to explain the fundamentals of preliminary research and focused on defining and refining the problem statement.

# Suggested Reading Material

- Chapter 3: Uma Sekaran & Roger Bougie (7th edition)
  *Research Methods for Business: A Skill-Building Approach*
  *Wiley*

# Questions/Queries

You can send your questions at:

`m.ayyoub@uosahaiwal.edu.pk`

Your queries would be entertained within one working day.

Thank you for your attention!