

How to Conceive and State a Researchable Problem: An Illustrated Guide for Higher Degree Students and their Research Supervisors

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Abstract: Have you ever produced a dissertation or thesis; or supervised a student involved in writing one? Or, are you engaged in any one of the two activities, right now? If you have, then which aspect(s) of the research project did you find rather challenging? Although different individuals will give different answers to this question, there is no doubt that a sizable number of beginning researchers as well as their supervisors would acknowledge that the conception and stating of the research problem is probably one of the most challenging part of the dissertation or thesis project. Yet, to state it bluntly, the strength of any dissertation or thesis is anchored on how succinctly the research problem is conceived and stated. In this paper, an attempt has been made, with the use of examples, to reconceptualise the notion of research problem and to illustrate, step by step, how a research problem can be conceived and satisfactorily stated. Therefore, it is hoped, that the paper will be of use to the higher degree students, together with their research supervisors, while undertaking the dissertation or thesis project.

Keywords: Research, research problem, higher degree students, dissertation, thesis, supervisors
