

MUTEESA I ROYAL UNIVERSITY (MRU)

SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

COURSE UNIT: RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY PUBLICATION SKILLS

COURSE CODE: EDU 6207

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UNIT 2: Incorporating the use of research questions, thesis statements, and introductions into your Study

Crafting a Good Research Question

Introduction

The research question is the foundation of any scholarly study, providing direction and purpose to the entire research process. A well-formulated research question not only narrows the scope of the study but also helps in defining the research objectives, guiding the methodology, and framing the analysis. In academic fields like Business Administration and Management, Education, and Mass Communication, crafting a good research question is particularly important as it ensures the study addresses relevant issues that contribute to the advancement of knowledge in those fields.

A research question should possess several key qualities: it must be clear, focused, feasible, researchable, and relevant. For Master's students, the ability to develop a precise research question is critical because it helps them avoid undertaking overly broad or complex studies, which can often lead to confusion or misinterpretation of the data.

In this section, we will delve into the characteristics of a good research question and provide specific examples for students studying Business Administration and Management, Education, and Mass Communication.

Characteristics of a Good Research Question

- i. **Clarity and Focus:** A research question should be clear, concise, and focused on a specific aspect of a problem. It should avoid vague language and address a precise area that can be explored in depth.
- ii. **Feasibility:** A good research question should be something that can realistically be answered within the constraints of time, resources, and data availability.
- iii. **Researchability:** The question should be able to be explored using appropriate methods (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), and the data should be accessible for analysis.
- iv. **Relevance:** The research question should contribute to the field of study and address a problem or gap in knowledge. It must be significant to the academic discipline and capable of advancing theory or practice.
- v. **Originality:** While not every research question needs to be groundbreaking, it should offer fresh insights or build upon existing knowledge in meaningful ways.

Examples of Research Questions for Different Fields:

Business Administration and Management: Research Question Example: *"How does employee engagement influence organizational performance in medium-sized manufacturing companies in Uganda?"*

Explanation: This question is focused on a specific relationship (employee engagement and organizational performance), a defined industry (medium-sized manufacturing companies), and a country context (Uganda). It is feasible to investigate with employee surveys or performance data, and the question addresses a relevant and timely issue in management studies. Moreover, the question is researchable, as it can be approached using both qualitative and quantitative methods, depending on the available data.

Education: Research Question Example: *"What are the effects of blended learning on student academic performance in higher education institutions in Uganda?"*

Explanation: This question is clear, focused, and researchable within the context of modern educational practices. Blended learning is a growing trend, especially in light of digital transformations. The question can be explored using both qualitative

(interviews with teachers and students) and quantitative (analysis of student grades) methods. The feasibility of the research depends on access to data from universities or higher learning institutions in Uganda.

Mass Communication: Research Question Example: *"How does social media usage influence political participation among university students in Uganda?"*

Explanation: This research question is relevant to both media studies and political science, addressing the growing role of social media in shaping political behaviors. It focuses on a specific group (university students) and their use of a particular media type (social media). The question can be researched through surveys, content analysis of social media platforms, and interviews, making it feasible within the available resources and time.

Conclusion

Formulating a good research question is the first step in ensuring the success of any research project, particularly for Master's students in Business Administration and Management, Education, and Mass Communication. By focusing on clarity, feasibility, researchability, and relevance, students can narrow their scope and make significant contributions to their respective fields of study.

In fields like Business Administration, Education, and Mass Communication, research questions should aim to address real-world problems and offer solutions that can benefit both theory and practice. For example, business students might explore the relationship between employee engagement and performance, while education students might investigate new teaching methods in the context of blended learning. In Mass Communication, the influence of social media on political behavior is a highly relevant and contemporary issue.

A well-crafted research question sets the stage for a rigorous and impactful scholarly work that can drive further research and contribute to positive changes in society.

B. The Relationship Between the Research Question and the Research Methodology (Disciplinary Norms)

Introduction

When conducting research, one of the most important things to consider is how the research question connects to the research methodology. The research question is the starting point of any research. It defines what you want to study. On the other hand, the research methodology is the process you will use to find answers to that question. The way you approach a research question depends heavily on the subject or field you are working in, which is referred to as disciplinary norms.

Disciplinary norms are the common practices and guidelines followed by researchers in different academic fields. These norms influence how research questions are formed and how research methods are selected. For example, what works in Business Administration and Management may not be suitable for Education or Mass Communication studies.

1. Business Administration and Management:

In **Business Administration and Management**, research often involves understanding how businesses operate, how managers make decisions, or how various factors impact business performance. Researchers in this field tend to focus on practical problems that businesses face. The research questions in business are often designed to help improve organizational practices, solve real-world problems, or make predictions.

Example of a Research Question:

- *"How does employee motivation impact productivity in small businesses in Uganda?"*

Methodology Used

Quantitative Approach: In this case, researchers might use a **survey** to collect numerical data from employees and employers. The survey could ask questions like: "How satisfied are you with your job?" or "How motivated do you feel at work?" Researchers would then analyze this data statistically to see if there is a relationship between employee motivation and productivity.

Disciplinary Norms: In business studies, quantitative methods (like surveys or statistical analysis) are commonly used because they provide clear, measurable data. However, **qualitative methods** (like interviews or case studies) can also be used if researchers want to understand deeper, personal insights about motivation that are not easy to measure with numbers.

2. Education

In **Education**, research often seeks to improve teaching methods, understand student learning, or evaluate the effectiveness of educational policies. Education research questions are frequently about how to improve learning outcomes or address challenges in educational systems.

Example of a Research Question:

- *"What is the impact of using technology in the classroom on student engagement in primary schools in Uganda?"*

Methodology Used:

Qualitative Approach: To answer this question, researchers might observe classes, interview teachers and students, and look at how technology is used in daily lessons. They could also gather feedback through focus groups with students and teachers to understand their experiences.

Disciplinary Norms: In education, both **qualitative** and **quantitative** methods are common. **Qualitative methods** (such as observations and interviews) help researchers understand personal experiences and perspectives, while **quantitative methods** (such as surveys and tests) can measure learning outcomes and engagement levels. Researchers might mix both approaches (**mixed methods**) to get a complete picture.

3. Mass Communication:

In **Mass Communication**, research often explores how media affects society, the role of journalism, or how communication strategies influence public opinion. The research questions in this field can focus on anything from the effects of media on political views to how advertising influences consumer behavior.

Example of a Research Question:

- *"How does social media influence political opinions among university students in Uganda?"*

Methodology Used

- **Mixed Methods Approach:** Researchers could use a **survey** to gather quantitative data about how often students use social media and what political opinions they hold. They could also conduct **interviews** or **focus groups** to get deeper, qualitative insights into why students feel the way they do about politics and social media.
- **Disciplinary Norms:** In Mass Communication, researchers often use **mixed methods**, combining **quantitative** data (like surveys) with **qualitative** insights (like interviews or content analysis of social media posts). This is because media research often involves both measurable data and deeper understandings of people's feelings and opinions.

Key Points to Understand the Relationship Between Research Question and Methodology:

1. The Research Question Guides the Methodology:

The type of research question you ask determines the method you use. For example, a question asking about **how many people** hold a particular view will likely need a **quantitative method** (e.g., surveys). A question asking about **why** people hold a certain view will likely require a **qualitative method** (e.g., interviews).

2. Disciplinary Norms Influence Method Selection:

- Each academic field has its preferred methods. For example:

In **Business Administration**, researchers often use surveys and statistical tools.

In **Education**, researchers may combine classroom observations with test results.

In **Mass Communication**, both **content analysis** (studying media) and **surveys** are commonly used. Each discipline values certain types of data. Business may prioritize numbers and performance data, Education may value insights into classroom

behavior, and Mass Communication may focus on understanding public opinion and media effects.

3. Flexibility in Methodology

Some research questions may require **both qualitative and quantitative methods**. For example, if a researcher wants to study how technology affects student learning, they could use both surveys (quantitative) and classroom observations or interviews (qualitative). This combination provides a more complete understanding of the topic.

Conclusion

The relationship between the research question and methodology is crucial because it shapes the entire research process. A research question determines what kind of data is needed, and the methodology is how that data will be collected and analyzed. The disciplinary norms in each field guide the choice of methodology. For example, business researchers may favor quantitative surveys, educational researchers might combine qualitative and quantitative methods, and mass communication researchers may use mixed methods to explore media effects.

Understanding these relationships helps ensure that the research process is focused, feasible, and capable of answering the research question effectively.

C. Crafting the Thesis Statement: Its Form and Characteristics; Its Function in Controlling the Paper

Introduction

The thesis statement is a crucial component of any academic paper, including Master's theses. It provides a concise summary of the main point or claim of the paper. Essentially, it is the foundation upon which the entire research or argument is built. Crafting a strong thesis statement is vital because it directs the reader on what to expect from the paper and sets the tone for the research and discussion that follows.

A good thesis statement clearly communicates the paper's purpose, guides the writer in maintaining focus, and helps in structuring the argument. Understanding its form,

characteristics, and function in controlling the paper is key to writing a successful research paper, especially in the fields of Business Administration, Education, and Mass Communication.

Form and Characteristics of a Thesis Statement

A well-crafted thesis statement should:

- i. **Be Concise:** A thesis statement should be clear and to the point, usually only one or two sentences long. It should avoid being too broad or vague.
- ii. **Present a Clear Argument or Claim:** It should state the main idea or position that the writer intends to prove or explain in the paper. It's not just a fact but an assertion that can be supported with evidence.
- iii. **Be Specific:** A strong thesis statement is not vague or general but focuses on a particular aspect of the topic that can be explored and argued.
- iv. **Guide the Paper's Structure:** The thesis helps structure the rest of the paper. Each section or argument should align with and support the thesis statement.
- v. **Be Debatable:** The thesis should be something that people can agree or disagree with, not a statement of fact. It is an argument that invites discussion or exploration.

Examples of Thesis Statements in Different Disciplines

1. Business Administration and Management

Example of a Thesis Statement

- *"Effective employee engagement strategies significantly improve productivity in small and medium-sized businesses in Uganda, particularly when managers involve employees in decision-making processes."*

Explanation:

- **Concise and Clear:** The statement clearly defines what the paper will address – employee engagement and its impact on productivity.
- **Specific:** It specifies the context (small and medium-sized businesses) and the role of managers in decision-making.

- **Debatable:** The statement presents an argument that can be supported with evidence but also challenged or critiqued.
- **Guiding the Paper's Structure:** The paper will likely be organized around discussing different employee engagement strategies, how they impact productivity, and the role of management in involving employees.

2. Education

Example of a Thesis Statement

- *"Blended learning methods, when combined with traditional classroom teaching, can enhance student engagement and academic performance in Ugandan secondary schools, especially in rural areas."*

Explanation

- **Concise and Clear:** The thesis directly states the main idea: blended learning can improve student engagement and performance.
- **Specific:** It focuses on a particular educational method (blended learning), a particular education level (secondary schools), and a specific geographical context (rural Uganda).
- **Debatable:** This statement can be supported or contested with research on the effectiveness of blended learning.
- **Guiding the Paper's Structure:** The paper would likely focus on defining blended learning, discussing its benefits, and comparing it to traditional teaching methods in rural areas.

3. Mass Communication

Example of a Thesis Statement

- *"Social media platforms have become powerful tools for political participation among young adults in Uganda, influencing both their voting behavior and engagement in political discussions."*

Explanation

- **Concise and Clear:** This thesis is direct and to the point, outlining the focus of the paper – the impact of social media on political participation.
- **Specific:** It narrows down the topic to young adults in Uganda and political participation, providing a clear area of exploration.

- **Debatable:** The statement suggests that social media impacts political behavior, which can be debated and researched through surveys or case studies.
- **Guiding the Paper's Structure:** The paper would likely explore social media's role in political engagement, its impact on voting behavior, and how young adults interact with political content on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

The Function of the Thesis Statement: Controlling the Paper

The thesis statement serves as the **control** for the paper, meaning it keeps the writer focused and helps the reader understand the main argument. It provides a roadmap for the rest of the research, and everything in the paper should relate back to it. Here's how the thesis statement functions to control the paper:

1. Focusing the Research

- A strong thesis helps keep the research focused. It prevents writers from straying into unrelated topics. Every section of the paper should contribute to proving or discussing the thesis statement.

Example in Business Administration

- If the thesis statement is about employee engagement and productivity, the paper should only focus on strategies that engage employees and affect productivity, not unrelated business topics like marketing strategies or financial analysis.

2. Guiding the Structure of the Paper

- A thesis statement provides an outline for the rest of the paper. Each paragraph or section of the paper should support or elaborate on the thesis statement.

Example in Education

- A paper with the thesis on the impact of blended learning will likely have sections on what blended learning is, why it's beneficial, how it can be implemented, and evidence of its success in rural Uganda.

3. Making the Argument Clear to the Reader

The thesis gives the reader a clear idea of the argument or claim that will be made in the paper. This helps the reader follow the structure and logic of the writing.

Example in Mass Communication

A thesis about social media influencing political participation sets the stage for discussing how social media platforms shape political opinions and voting behavior. Readers know exactly what to expect.

4. Providing a Roadmap for the Writer

A well-defined thesis statement helps the writer stay on track. It acts as a guide, ensuring that each section contributes to answering or explaining the thesis.

Conclusion

The thesis statement is a key element in academic writing, especially for Master's students. It provides clarity, focus, and direction for both the writer and the reader. A good thesis statement should be concise, clear, debatable, and specific, and it should guide the structure of the entire paper.

In fields like Business Administration, Education, and Mass Communication, the thesis statement helps in formulating the main argument, organizing the research, and controlling the content of the paper. By carefully crafting a strong thesis, students ensure that their papers are focused, structured, and meaningful, leading to a compelling and well-organized academic work.

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