Unit 1: MEANING OF RESEARCH

UNIT STRUCTURE

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1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- understand what research in Social Sciences is
- analyze the objectives of Research
- identify the essential components of research
- know about theory
- understand interdependence between research and theory
- identify the parameters of good theory

1.2 INTRODUCTION

While enquiry or reason could be exercised over anything that we come into contact with, research is beyond the day to day exercise of enquiry. Terminologically, 'research' is composed of two parts-'re' and 'search'. It means 'revisiting' or 're-examining'. The distinctiveness of

research from day to day enquiry could be seen from its precise objectives, the methodologies and the ethics of doing research. While most of the everyday enquiry is based on 'what' question, research in social sciences is primarily interested in 'why' questions. Research attempted to bridge the knowledge gap by relying on the existing knowledge resources. Thus it attempts to provide new knowledge claims. However, all these claims must be verified. None of the claims are true for all the times. Here, the significance of methodology comes into play. Methodology consists of a collection of norms and principles that helps the researcher to carry on research. The norms and principles must be explicit. Moreover, it must be clarified that there is no such thing as strict rule in research methodology, since these methodologies are always evolving. So, rules in research methodology are evolving, rather than fixed.

As already mentioned, research is a work that indicates going to something which has already been searched. However, during the process, the questions that the research is attempting to answer, make those questions the core of the work. So it's a process of moving from periphery of existing knowledge to the core. Here, 'core' indicates some major or central ideas. The assumption that lies behind carrying on research is that what has already been done is not quite enough. So through research one can try to make it right or better.

In this unit we shall try to understand the meaning of Research. We shall also learn about how research is conducted in social science. Apart from these, we shall also get to know about objectives of Research, components of Research, Relationship between Research and Theory so on and so forth.

1.3 MEANING OF RESEARCH

- Research is a careful study that is done to find and report new knowledge about something. It is the activity of getting information about a subject.
- Merriam Webster's Dictionary has defined research as ,
  - Careful or diligent search
  - Studious enquiry or examination; especially investigation aimed at *discovery* and interpretation of facts; *revision* of accepted theories

or laws in the light of new facts; or *practical application* of such new or revised theories

- The collecting of information about a particular subject

Further, in order to conceptualise the concept of 'scientific research' it can be defined on a systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among natural phenomena.

1.3.1 Research in Social Sciences

The methodology determines the discipline. If it is carried out in accordance with systematic, explicit principles and norms, i.e. its content could be verified, then it is called scientific research. Simply speaking, methodology ultimately determines whether a discipline is scientific or not. There are some distinctions between research in natural sciences and social sciences although both are scientific. These are mentioned below:

- The methodology followed in social sciences is primarily scientific methods such as theories, concepts etc. This is aimed to enhance our understanding of social processes and problems.
- Whereas in natural sciences, research is predominantly carried inside laboratory, in social sciences research is done in the society. Here the field is actual social locations.
- Social sciences are regarded as 'soft science'. The result of research in social science does not claim as much certainty as natural sciences.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What determines whether a discipline is scientific or not?

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Q2: What is the other term used to indicate 'social sciences'?

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1.4 OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

The main objective of research is further contribution to the existing knowledge. Knowledge in any field would be static without further research. Besides, applicability of the research in real context is also another objective of the researcher. For instance, by studying about the causes for communal violence in a place, the researcher may contribute to identify the causes responsible for outbreak of communal violence. Then, steps could be taken to prevent further happening of communal violence by way of controlling or preventing the occurrence of those causes. The applicability of research further points out to understanding different socio- political phenomena, different power relations in society etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3 : Fill in the blanks:

a) Knowledge in any field would be static without further __.

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b) __ of research in real context is the objective of the researcher.

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1.5 COMPONENTS OF RESEARCH PROCESS

There are some essential components of the research process in Social Sciences. These components together make the research systematic and scientific. These are as follows:

- Research Question
- Research Proposal
- Hypothesis
- Methodology
- Literature Review

- Data Analysis
- Conclusion
- **Research Question:** The researcher needs to carry the research through formulating central research questions. The question is mainly derived from the larger research area that the researcher is undertaking. One needs to be very careful while formulating the research question because it largely determines the subsequent work.

Example of A Research Proposal:

- **Research Question:** Does the level of development affect political stability of North-East region of India?
- **Proposal:** The level of development affects political instability of North- East region in India.

Variables:

Dependant Variable: Political Instability of North-east region in India.

Independent Variable: Level of development.

Hypotheses:

- The demand for secession in some of the states of North-East aroused because of lack of development which is interlinked with the arguments of exploitation in the form of internal colonialism.
- The uneven development led to further disintegration of the region into smaller states which gave rise to political upheavals for some times.
- **Research Proposal:** Depending upon the research question, the proposal is made. While constructing the research proposal, existing literature on the subject is considered. This provides the background understanding so that research proposal would not be misleading. It can be either affirmative or negative.
- **Hypothesis:** Hypothesis is the initial tentative conclusion made by the researcher. There may be single or more than one hypothesis in any research.
- **Methodology:** Research in Social Sciences could be either qualitative or quantitative. However, nowadays, mixed method, which is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative method, is being widely preferred.

- **Literature Review:** In qualitative research, literature review plays a crucial role. It enables the researcher to establish familiarity with the area. This familiarity helps to examine and further the knowledge claims.
- **Data Analysis:** Both in quantitative and mixed method, data analysis form a crucial component of the research. In recent times, development of different software such as SPSS(Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) has made the work of data analysis easier.
- **Conclusion:** Based on the study that the researcher has undertaken and the analysis of the data, the conclusion is arrived. The conclusion is subject to further examination.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4: What are the essential components of research process?

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Q5: Fill in the blanks:

a) __ is the initial tentative conclusion.

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b) __is the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

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c) Research in social science could be either __or __.

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Q6. What is the full form of SPSS?

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1.6 THEORY

The above mentioned research process ultimately gives rise to theory. Before explaining about theory building, it is necessary to understand what theory is. There is no agreed definition of what a theory is. For present purpose, theory could be understood as systematic explanation of any socio-political phenomenon or incidents. It must be systematic in the sense that the theory must be subjected to verification so that one can further carry on and modify the theory. The classical explanation of evolution of theory could be found in Marxist notion of Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis. The origin of this could be found in George F.W. Hegel. According to this, ideas evolve in a dialectical or conflicting process. There exists a dominant idea, which is called as 'Thesis'. Gradually, contesting ideas or counter ideas develop, which is called as 'Antithesis'. From this conflict a new idea that is 'Synthesis' is developed. In Thomas S. Kuhn, we find his idea of evolution of theory. In his book, '*The Structure of Scientific Revolution'* which was published in the year, 1962, he has argued that most of the time the scientific community works under a dominant paradigm. This is called as 'normal science'. This normal science carries only puzzle solving activity within the dominant paradigm. However, subsequently anomalies are found. The dominant paradigm cannot answer those anomalies during this crisis stage. Then, a paradigm shift takes place and new ideas emerge. So, it is only when two paradigms are incommensurable, scientific revolution takes place. Karl Popper has challenged this assumption by arguing that there is no sacred idea or dominant paradigm.

Besides giving systematic explanation of socio-political incidents, theory actually gives a foundation to epistemic discourse of social phenomenon. Through help of theories generalizations could be made about social phenomenon. It gives explanations of why or how some events took place. In the book, *'Investigating Communication: An Introduction to Research Methods'* by Lawrence R. Frey, Carl H. Botan, Paul G. Friedman, Gary L. Kreps in 1991; theory is defined as, "A generalization about a phenomenon that explains how or why the phenomenon occurs."

1.7 RESEARCH AND THEORY

There is a continuing debate about which comes first, research or theory. According to some scholars, theory is the basis of research. Theory provides the necessary tool for carrying out the research. On the other hand, some others argue that it is research that actually leads to theory building. This debate has no agreed conclusion till day. However, there is no disagreement about the interdependence of these two. To understand the interdependence between research and theory, let us first understand why theory is useful in research.

1.7.1 Importance of Theory

- Helps the researcher to classify things, such as entities, processes and casual relationships. It offers a conceptual scheme for classifying, systematising and inter-relating empirical data.
- Helps the researcher to understand how and why already observed regularities occur.
- Helps the researcher to predict the unobserved phenomenon.
- Guides the researcher in useful and correct direction. It suggests that there are other social phenomena that can be understood in the same general terms as the one under study.
- Serves as a basis for further action.
- Provides an orientation for search. It points to the direction of research indicating where meaningful relationships among variables are to be found.

1.7.2 Four parameters of a good theory

As we have already mentioned, it is only through research that a theory could be further explained and examined. There are certain parameters in research to assess whether a theory is good or not. These are mentioned below:

- Parsimony: It is the ability of the theory to explain in relatively few terms and statements.

- Breadth or range of phenomenon explained by a particular theory
- Accuracy of prediction of new phenomenon
- Ability to be disproved

However while assessing theories it must be remembered that all theories only provide 'approximations to truth'. No theory can provide the truth. It's only about the nearness to the truth through which we assess it. So, it is only some truth claims that the theory provides and not 'the truth'. The process of theory development, therefore, is only approximations to truth, but no theory is ever true.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q7: What are the parameters of a good theory?

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Q8: According to Thomas Kuhn, how does revolutionary science emerge?

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1.8 LET US SUM UP

- The distinctiveness of research from day to day enquiry could be seen from its precise objectives, the methodologies and the ethics of doing research.
- Research in social sciences is primarily interested in 'why' questions.
- Methodology consists of a collection of norms and principles that helps the researcher to carry on research.
- Rules in research methodology are evolving, rather than fixed.
- Research is a careful study that is done to find and report new knowledge about something.
- Scientific methodology ultimately determines whether a discipline is scientific or not.

- Methodology followed in social sciences is aimed to enhance our understanding of social processes and problems.
- Social sciences are regarded as 'soft science'.
- The main objective of research is further contribution to the existing knowledge.
- Applicability of the research in real context is also another objective of the researcher.
- Research Question, Research Proposal, Hypothesis, Methodology, Literature Review, Data Analysis, Conclusion- these are the essential components of the research process.
- Hypothesis is the initial tentative conclusion made by the researcher.
- Mixed method, which is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative method, is being widely preferred these days.
- In recent times, development of different software such as SPSS(Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) has made the work of data analysis easier.
- Theory could be understood as systematic explanation of any socio-political phenomenon or incidents.
- The origin of Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis could be found in George F.W. Hegel.
- '*The Structure of Scientific Revolution'* by Thomas S. Kuhn was published in the year, 1962.
- Karl Popper has challenged the assumption of a dominant paradigm by arguing that there is no sacred idea or a dominant paradigm.
- Theories give explanation of why or how some events take place.
- Theories help the researcher to classify things, such as entities, processes and casual relationships.
- Theory helps the researcher to understand how and why already observed regularities occur.
- Theory helps the researcher to predict the unobserved phenomenon.
- Theory guides the researcher into a useful and correct direction.
- Theory serves as a basis for further action.

- Parsimony is the ability of the theory to explain in relatively few terms and statements.
- The process of theory development is only approximations to truth, but no theory is ever true.



1.9 FURTHER READING

1) Giddens, Anthony,(1987). *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

2) Kuhn, S Thomas, (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* USA, University of Chicago Press.

3) Raymond, Aaron, *(1965). Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, Hamondsworth, Penguin.



1.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The methodology determines whether a discipline is scientific or not.

Ans to Q No 2: 'Social Sciences' are also known as 'soft sciences'.

Ans to Q No 3: a) Research; b) Applicability

Ans to Q No 4: Research Question, Research Proposal, Hypothesis, Methodology, Literature Review, Data Analysis, Conclusion- these are the essential components of the research process.

Ans to Q No 5: a) Hypothesis; b) Mixed method; c) Qualitative, Quantitative.

Ans to Q No 6: The full form of SPSS is 'Statistical Package for the Social Sciences'.

Ans to Q No 7: There are four parameters to assess a good theory. These are mentioned below:

a) Parsimony: It is the ability of the theory to explain in relatively few terms and statements.

b) Breadth or range of phenomenon explained by a particular theory.

c) Accuracy of prediction of new phenomenon.