

# POLI 343

# Introduction to Political Research

## Session 6-The Research Problem

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# The Specific Research Problem

Research is a cycle. It starts with a problem and ends with a solution to the problem. The problem statement is therefore the axis which the whole research revolves around, because it explains in short the aim of the research.

**What is a Research Problem?** A research problem is the situation that causes the researcher to feel apprehensive, confused and ill at ease. It is the demarcation of a problem area within a certain context involving the **WHO** or **WHAT**, the **WHERE**, the **WHEN** and the **WHY** of the problem situation.



# Research Problem: Sources

There are many problem situations that may give rise to research. Three sources usually contribute to problem identification. Own experience or the experience of others may be a source of problem supply. A second source could be scientific literature. You may read about certain findings and notice that a certain field was not covered. This could lead to a research problem. Theories could be a third source. Shortcomings in theories could be researched.

# Research Problem: Sources ;CoÛt'd:

Research can thus be aimed at clarifying or substantiating an existing theory, at clarifying contradictory findings, at correcting a faulty methodology, at correcting the inadequate or unsuitable use of statistical techniques, at reconciling conflicting opinions, or at solving existing practical problems.



# Identification of the Research Problem:

The prospective researcher should think on what caused the need to do the research (problem identification). The question that he/she should ask is: Are there questions about this problem to which answers have not been found up to the present? Research originates from a need that arises. A clear distinction between the PROBLEM and the PURPOSE should be made. The problem is the aspect the researcher worries about, think about, wants to find a solution for.

# Identification of the Research Problem

## • Context •

The purpose is to solve the problem, i.e. find answers to the question(s). If there is no clear problem formulation, the purpose and methods are meaningless.

### **Keep the following in mind:**

1. Outline the general context of the problem area.
2. Highlight key theories, concepts and ideas current in this area.
3. What appear to be some of the underlying assumptions of this area?
4. Why are these issues identified important?
5. What needs to be solved?



# Identification of the Research Problem

## • Content

The research problem should always be formulated grammatically correct and as completely as possible.

You should bear in mind the wording (expressions) you use. Avoid meaningless words. There should be no doubt in the mind of the reader what your intentions are. Demarcating the research field into manageable parts by dividing the main problem into sub problems is of the utmost importance.

# Sub-Problem

Sub problems are problems related to the main problem identified. Sub problems flow from the main problem and make up the main problem. It is the means to reach the set goal in a manageable way and contribute to solving the problem.

The statement of the problem involves the demarcation and formulation of the problem, i.e. the WHO/WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY. It usually includes the statement of the hypothesis.



# Checklist for Testing the Feasibility of the Research Problem

- ❖ Is the problem of current interest? Will the research results have social, educational or scientific value?
- ❖ Will it be possible to apply the results in practice?
- ❖ Does the research contribute to the science of education?
- ❖ Will the research opt new problems and lead to further research?
- ❖ Is the research problem important? Will you be proud of the result?

# Checklist for Testing the Feasibility of the Research Problem:

- ❖ Is there enough scope left within the area of research (field of research)?
- ❖ Can you find an answer to the problem through research? Will you be able to handle the research problem?
- ❖ Will it be practically possible to undertake the research?
- ❖ Will it be possible for another researcher to repeat the research?
- ❖ Is the research free of any ethical problems and limitations?



# Checklist for Testing the Feasibility of the Research Project:

- ❖ Will it have any value?
- ❖ Do you have the necessary knowledge and skills to do the research? Are you qualified to undertake the research?
- ❖ Is the problem important to you and are you motivated to undertake the research?
- ❖ Is the research viable in your situation? Do you have enough time and energy to complete the project?
- ❖ Do you have the necessary funds for the research?

# Checklist for Testing the Feasibility of the Research Project:

- ❖ Will you be able to complete the project within the time available?
- ❖ Do you have access to the administrative, statistic and computer facilities the research necessitates?



# Sample Research Problem-The Defeat of the NPP in the 2008 General Elections

## Introduction

With a margin of just 0.3%, the presidential candidate of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), John Evans Atta Mills (50.13%), had defeated the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP), Nana Addo-Dankwa Akufo-Addo (49.77%) in the 2008/9 presidential elections held in Ghana on December 7, 2008 December 28, 2008, and January 1, 2009. Speculations about the process and outcome of the marathon elections were rife.

# Sample Research Problem-The Defeat of the NPP in the 2008 General Elections

A colleague remarked: "Ghana is the only country where the ruling party accused the opposition of rigging elections. Stealing and cheating accusations were rife and the country was for some days sitting on a kind of a time bomb especially in the days after the run-off elections in the Tain constituency where the NPP had sought funds to start building the Bui dam-the country's second hydro-electric power station. The NPP government after eight years in office campaigned on its record of achievements.



# Sample Research Problem-The Defeat of the

It had the following to point to:

- ❖ The National Health Insurance Scheme
- ❖ The School Feeding Programme
- ❖ The Capitation Grant
- ❖ Roads
- ❖ Bui dam
- ❖ Good governance
- ❖ Stabilization of the Cedi/Dollar rate

# Sample Research Problem-The Defeat of the

## **The research problem**

Despite this background of achievements it was only natural that the NPP expected to win both the parliamentary and presidential elections but the party lost both to the opposition NDC. Naturally the issue on the mind of the NPP is how to explain this defeat when they were expected to win. This is the burden of this research. There are many issues that need a more scientific explanation.



# Sample Research Problem-The Defeat of the

Given the track record of the eight years of NPP rule, there is a need to analyze the factors that helps an understanding of the narrow defeat of the ruling NPP which is one of the rare election outcomes in Africa. Election defeats for incumbents in Africa have been few and far between. It occurred in Zambia, Senegal, Benin and Ghana under the NDC in 2000. It has occurred for the second time in Ghana under the NPP in 2008. The burden of this research is to find out about the rather rare issue of the defeat of an incumbent African government.

# Sample Research Problem-The Defeat of the

To achieve this, the research seeks to find answers to the following questions which should lead to an understanding of the defeat of the incumbent NPP at the 2008 elections:

- ❖ Was the NPP complacent?
- ❖ Was the party plagued by internal conflicts?
- ❖ Did the party neglect its foot soldiers?
- ❖ Did the party's policies in the election year let them down?



# Sample Research Problem-The Defeat of the

- ❖ Could President Kufour have been part of the defeat of his own party?
- ❖ Could tribal politics have played a part in the defeat?

It is the belief of this research that answers to these questions and more would go a long way towards helping to explain the paradox of a government that has governed well and had various development projects to boast of and yet lost the election.

# Sample Research Problem-The Defeat of the

Still another paradox that the research seeks to explain is how the people of Tain, where the NPP government was building a new hydro-electric dam and a brand new city, ended up voting against the party and by so doing casting the final vote that consigned the NPP to defeat. The burden of this research is to find out the factors that account for the defeat of the NPP in the 2008 general elections.