

Advanced Research Methodology

2. Topics, Questions and Literature

Dr. Patricia Bauer
PhD EuroMed - FEPS
Cairo University
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How to Select a Topic?

- Most interesting problems concern complex policy fields or institutional settings.
- The first step of writing a paper, therefore, is to make the subject operationable for a seminar paper, that means:
 - ▶ „Less is more!“
 - ▶ Concentrate on a certain question
 - ▶ Concentrate on a special aspect
- Ensure that sufficient literature is available
- This means also: Assure that the topic is of any relevance
 - ▶ for the research field
 - ▶ for the research community
 - ▶ for the discipline

The Role of the Research Question

- The function of the research question is to indicate:
 - ▶ what aspect or phenomenon will be investigated,
 - ▶ what explanation will be provided.
- The most common types of questions are:
 - ▶ “Why?”
 - ▶ “How?”

Review of Literature I

- Functions:
 - ▶ framing the problem,
 - ▶ state of the art,
 - ▶ basis for comparison and contrasting the results
- Place in the inquiry:
 - ▶ in the introduction,
 - ▶ own chapter,
 - ▶ in the end

Review of Literature II

- Conducting the Literature Review:
 - ▶ Identify key words,
 - ▶ look for articles in encyclopedias, overviews and summaries,
 - ▶ search electronical databases for articles in the most respected journals, books, research reports and conference papers,
 - ▶ ensure that the sources you found are available to you,
 - ▶ evaluate whether the source is a useful contribution to your research proposal
 - ▶ design a literature map by writing summaries and ranking the relevance of the sources
 - ▶ write the literature review by structuring the literature thematically
- Decide on the citation style you use and stay consistent!!!

Contents of Literature Summaries

- What is the central problem?
- What is the central purpose of the study?
- What sample or empirical basis does it rely on?
- What methods are applied?
- What theory is used?
- What are the key results?
- In what context is the study embedded?
- What kind of conclusions can be drawn for your own research proposal or how important are the results for your research?