

# Unveiling Promising Research Avenues: A Systematic Guide for Selecting Researchable Topics

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## ABSTRACT

*One of the most challenging aspects of research is choosing a suitable topic. It is hard not to be intimidated by unlimited subjects in every field. Formulating effective research questions is one way to ease the stress of choosing a topic. Regrettably, some problems often arise as students attempt to formulate questions and topics. Researchers can avoid painful and frustrating wasted hours by recognising potential problems. This research employs bibliometric analysis with the R software to examine data obtained from Scopus database. The results show that there are limited number of papers available on this topic in the Scopus database. There is undoubtedly a gap in this area of research and therefore more research needs to be conducted on identifying a researchable topic. This paper provided guidelines to identify a potential research topic with a constructive approach. Researchers can reduce frustration and wasting of time by avoiding topic apathy, selecting a broad topic, not reading enough, and not being inquisitive enough. Researchers should focus on three significant features: capability, appropriateness, and relevance. The paper suggested beginning the process of identifying the research topic by developing a depth of knowledge in the area of interest. The depth can be developed from the literature, beginning from the core to the latest research papers that can be tracked from websites like Google Scholar, Research Gate etc.*

**Keywords:** Guidelines, Research Titles, Research Topics, Selection of Research Topics, Systematic Approach

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Selecting a topic is the first and most crucial stage in conducting research. This step will determine the subsequent actions of the study, i.e., identifying the research gap, defining the research topic, establishing the underlying theory(s), creating a theoretical framework, and gathering and analysing data. Therefore, researchers must choose a compelling and engaging topic. Every day, we evolve and discover new methods of doing things through research. In a contemporary human society, we must discover things worthy of recognition that are the result of years of arduous research by scholars. Curiosity and a desire to learn are two factors that motivate people to conduct study on a subject. If we analyse the inventions of the great scientists from Sir Isaac Newton to Galileo to Albert Einstein, their inquisitiveness led to ground-breaking discoveries that significantly propelled scientific progress. It emphasises that curiosity continues to be crucial in modern research, which has expanded our knowledge, improved our lives, and provided hope for solving new problems. Academic research is among the most important topics for young researchers and new doctoral students. In the area of academic research, publications are significant. Scholarly journal publication is the principle of recognition and prestige (Bedeian, 1996).

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Publishing journals enables academicians to leave their knowledge and mark it in a particular discipline (De Rond & Miller, 2005). Nowadays, it is a requirement for university lecturers and professors to publish their research work in well-established journals to get a good grade in the yearly performance appraisal. Moreover, Ph.D. students must post their research works in indexed journals to finish their Ph.D. studies. The necessity and benefit of academic writing are crucial in the career development of Ph.D. scholars and academicians.

However, the difficulty in academic research is selecting a good research topic or area. Most Ph.D. students and young researchers need help identifying a feasible and standard research topic. The struggle is the need for more knowledge on identifying a good research topic. Many doctoral students and researchers still need a research focus, and even those who do may still need more experience to develop a specific topic within a broader research area. Earlier studies were conducted on publishing research papers (Stoilescu & McDougall, 2010; Woodside, 2010). This study will propose a constructive approach to determine a good research topic for Ph.D. scholars and young researchers.

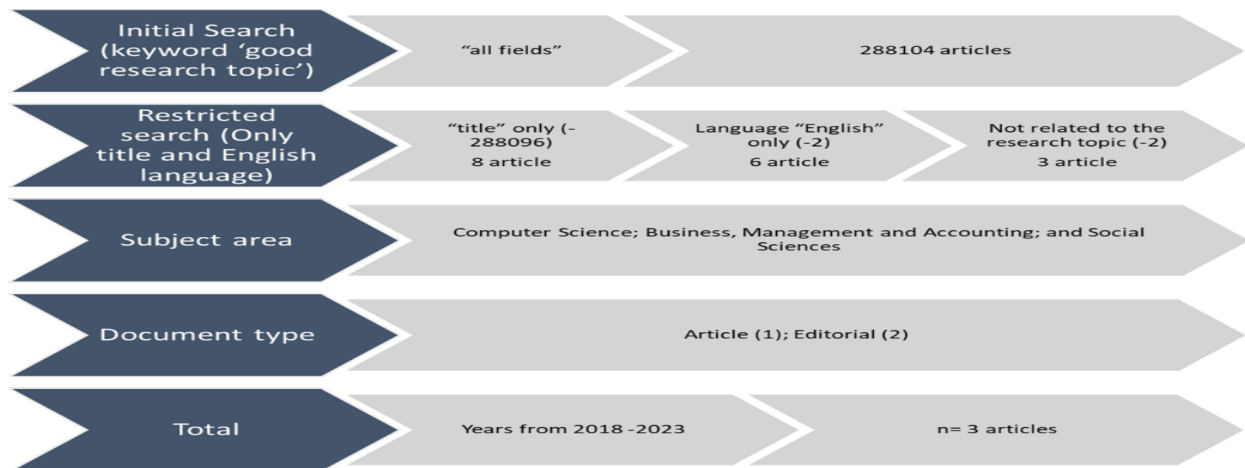
## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The research topic is one of the crucial elements in writing a research paper. Several authors have written documents on how to write a research proposal, conduct a literature review, and write a research paper. An insignificant number of research work has yet to be done on identifying a research topic. Leong and Muccio (2006) wrote a book chapter on finding a research topic while conducting psychological research. Based on a series of cognitive scripts, the study showed the procedure of finding a suitable research topic using the framework. In addition, Pansiri (2009) described their experiences on the predicament and disputes of conducting research in tourism management and provided some perception of the pragmatic process of identifying research philosophy, methods, and topics. Lei (2009) researched strategies for finding and selecting an ideal thesis or dissertation topic, where the author described the process of finding and choosing a perfect research topic based on previously published literature. In an article, Luse et al. (2012) explained how doctoral students select a research topic using Kuhn's classic work on the scientific revolution. Additionally, Alderman (2014) wrote an article on choosing a research topic where the author emphasised the discovery tools and multidisciplinary databases. Arbaugh et al. (2016) researched identifying research topic development in business and management education research using legitimation code theory. The study focused on four areas: distance education/online teaching and learning, business student ethics, entrepreneurship education, and characteristics/critiques of business schools. Besides, Fadhly et al. (2018) explored and recreated the cognitive processes of selecting a research topic using the grounded theory approach of Indonesian scientific writers. Moreover, France (2019) studied research norms by probing how successfully researchers choose research topics in business management disciplines. Furthermore, Adhikari (2020) addressed the challenges of selecting research topics by presenting strategies based on the author's experience and existing knowledge.

## **3. METHODS**

Data from the Scopus database was used in this study. The Scopus database was chosen because it is a widely accepted and reputable database for scholarly research and holds many articles in relevant fields within the Social Sciences (Tiwari, 2021). Initially, papers from Scopus's core collection were selected by using the keyword "Good Research Topic", "Interesting Research Topic", and limiting the search to only the title with a period from 2018 to 2023 to analyse the research publishing outputs. The data was extracted on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023. After eliminating unrelated topics, three suitable articles were selected for the study by restricting the search to the title.

All the data were collected from an extensive literature search. For the collection of data, the following processes have been followed – See Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Data Collection Processes

#### 4. RESULTS

To examine the data, this research employs bibliometric analysis with the R software (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Table 1 presents the primary information of the data:

**Table 1** Main Information of the Data

Descriptions	Results
Timespan	2018:2023
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	3
Documents	3
Average years from publication	2
Average citations per document	0
Average citations per year per doc	0
References	45
<b>DOCUMENT CONTENTS</b>	
Keywords Plus (ID)	12
Author's Keywords (DE)	8
<b>AUTHORS</b>	
Authors of single-authored documents	2      33.33%
Authors of multi-authored documents	4      66.77%
Total	6      100%
<b>AUTHORS COLLABORATION</b>	
Single-authored documents	2
Documents per author	0.5
Authors per document	2
Co-Authors per documents	2
Collaboration index	4

The main findings from the three research articles with total citation (TC), TC per Year, and normalised total citation (NTC) found in the Scopus database are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2** Main Findings from Earlier Studies

Year	Authors	Titles	Findings	TC	TC per year	NTC
2023	<u>Lim (2023)</u>	Choosing a good research topic for premier journals	A suitable research topic should be achievable, producing results that can be pursued and discovered through investigation	0	0	0
2022	<u>Davison et al. (2022)</u>	Anatomy of a Good Paper: Choosing Research Topics	Compelling research topics can be identified by engaging with real-world issues. To find your case, explore the world, focus on critical unresolved questions, and place your passion. By merging your interests with your research, you can create a comprehensive and purposeful endeavor	0	0	0
2018	<u>Selmer (2018)</u>	Good research topics – greenfield or acquisition?	Regarding market entry strategy, research topics can be self-generated or obtained from outside sources.	0	0	0

## 5. DISCUSSION

The above results show that more research needs to be conducted on identifying a research topic. There is undoubtedly a gap in this area of research on identifying a good research topic. Gaining from the above-mentioned findings in prior research (Davison et al., 2022; Lim, 2023; Selmer, 2018) the following approaches could play a major guideline in developing a good research topic.

### 5.1 Understanding Research

Research is an organised, objective, and systematic process of study. American sociologist Earl Robert Babbie defined research as "systematic inquiry to describe, explain, predict, and control the observed phenomenon." For doctoral students, it is a voyage of discovery and a careful critical inquiry in seeking principle. Furthermore, research is an attitude to solve problems. Research starts with the problem. The mere formulation of a problem is far more often essential than its solution, which may be merely a matter of mathematical or experimental skill. To raise new questions and possibilities and regard old problems from a new angle requires creative imagination and marks real advances in science (Albert & Leopold, 1966). The truth is that only a few people try to fix the problem, while the majority ignore it or speak about it. A researcher needs to develop a problem-solving attitude. So, the first thing to do is to choose a subject that grows interest in a new researcher's mind. The research process will be more meaningful if anyone becomes passionate about the topic. The case must also be narrow enough, eventually making it unable to concentrate (MIT Library, 2022). Identifying a problem is indeed the first step in conducting research. Research is only begun when a problem is identified.

### 5.2 Attributes of a Good Topic

A good research topic depends on three major features: Capability, Appropriateness, and Relevance. Capability is the ability to define problems, determine objectives and priorities, conduct sound scientific research, build sustainable institutions, and find solutions to significant challenges (Royal Academy of Overseas Sciences, 2007). Before selecting any topic, a researcher has to answer a set of questions. They need to understand whether the topic fascinates them. In addition, they have the appropriate research skills to complete the project on time and gain access

to the data. Moreover, the topic must be current when the research project is completed. Another critical factor is the availability of the financial resources to conduct research. Another crucial feature of a good research topic is the appropriateness of the case selected. In selecting a good topic, the researcher must be aware of the standards to be met. They should ensure that the research will provide fresh insight into the case. Moreover, they should analyse whether the research topic matches their career goals. Last but not least, relevance is an essential feature of a good research topic. The researcher will select a topic related to the organisation's or potential supervisor's idea.

### 5.3 Start with the Depth

Many students must prepare to participate in the actions required to choose a research subject based on a defined problem. Before deciding on a feasible research topic, the person must mentally prepare to fully engage in the exploration and development process, which can be difficult for many. As a result, in research, depth is crucial. It is understanding what is happening, why, and how it is happening. It is essential to know if the problem is also researchable to find a solution that will solve the issue. Here, we can start by developing some depth. Primarily, choosing a self-interested course early in the graduate program is wise, which will show the pathway to a future career. Attending symposiums/seminars organised in the department and reading survey papers in the area of interest offers depth of knowledge in the subject area. Listening to any conference at the university helps to understand how research is conducted and how it is presented to people. Listening to the question-answer session gives insight, which helps to prepare for future research. Talking to faculty members and other academics helps to develop depth through their different ideas, experiences, and thinking patterns. After gathering some depth, the next step is to develop or foster some depth. How can it be attainable? Here is some excellent initiative to develop depth.

#### 5.3.1 Search for New Literature

All studies require a systematic literature search because it is necessary to understand how other researchers have approached the issue, framed the research challenge, and addressed the problem (Hart, 2001). To search the literature the following steps could be followed:

- **Discover the latest research in recent conferences:** Conferences are essential activities in the life of a researcher. Attending a conference is widely acknowledged as a profound method of learning about recent research and ideas. Fresh and latest topics are presented at the conferences. Conferences also provide opportunities for face-to-face encounters with thought leaders in your field and critical advice and mentoring for those just starting in academics (Parsons, 2015).
- **Find papers in Google Scholar, then follow the citation links:** Usually, more citations indicate the quality of the paper as more people have read it. Hence, more cited papers can give more insight.
- **Read a research paper each day and summarise it:** To develop depth of knowledge in a particular area, it is recommended to read recent research papers related to the researcher's area of interest.

#### 5.3.2 How to Identify Research Area

The first step in preparing a paper is to choose a research topic. You must select a study topic that interests you both professionally and personally. "A topic in which you are only vaguely interested at the outset is likely to become a topic in which you have no interest and with which

you will fail to produce your finest work," according to experienced researchers. Your study topic should be related to your future professional path and can help you reach your goals. Saunders et al. (2014) identified research methods for business students where many need to pay more attention to the importance of choosing a relevant research topic suited for a dissertation. This is a decision that should be made with time. In an ideal world, written literature would convey the most helpful information. The following questions may help you choose a study topic:

- What is the importance of this research to my work or the broader field?
- How can this article help me formulate my research questions?
- Do the author's propositions require more explanation?
- What issues or questions does the author still need to address?
- Is there a different viewpoint that I can consider?
- What other factors may influence the results?
- Are the approaches or measures used outdated or no longer valid in your field? Is there any research scope for you to test the hypotheses using a current approach?

Finally, discuss the issues and problems in your field with your research advisor to generate ideas for research. It is always the best decision to discuss with the supervisor.

### 5.3.3 Constructive Approach to Choose a Topic

This phase will determine the rest of the steps, including your research statement, which sources you will utilise, and how you will write your paper. As a result, you must select a topic that is both strong and intriguing. It needs to be small and concentrated enough to be fascinating and broad enough to find sufficient information. Concentrate on the research topic that interests you and about which you are knowledgeable:

- **What interests you:** During conceptualising this step, the researcher has to identify some areas/topics that he/she possesses an interest in. This interest can grow inherently from past educational background or any subject that seems to him/her attractive.
- **Availability of sources:** You have to make sure that there are enough sources available on the selected topic to quote in your research paper. Selecting a topic that does not have need source material available can make your writing very tough. Ample reference materials are essential as you will quickly write every section of the research paper. You can always enquire with your university librarian about the source material before you finalise your topic.
- **What is the current state of research and discussion in this field/area:** In this step, the researcher has to review the latest publications in the field of interest? Usually, it is recommended to review papers that have been published within the past five years. If he/she follows the sequence of the studies yearly, it will help to develop a clear picture of the current state of the research area.
- **How would undertaking this research contribute to knowledge in the field?** One of the most critical steps to identify a researchable topic is that the researcher must focus on the gaps or areas not previously discussed by previous researchers during the literature review. The research topic that he/she is choosing must contribute to the knowledge of the field academically, and it must have some managerial implications.

- **A topic you are inquisitive about:** Select a research topic that you are less acquainted with but still have a desire to know more about. There will be a tendency to bring up everything that you already know in your write-up if you are selecting a research topic you are already well-versed in. This is different from your aim of writing a research paper. Therefore, the research topic should be selected to know the answers to a question you are curious about.
- **What is the significance of the topic?** The researcher must ensure the selected topic or area contributes to the existing body of knowledge and some industrial implications. Sometimes, a research paper gets rejected for publication in a journal due to the lack of significance of the study. The research topic must be unique that can contribute to the field of study. So, the researcher must ensure the topic's significance before conducting research in an area.
- **A topic that is thought-provoking:** You may enjoy writing on challenging topics that are also demanding. Selecting a challenging topic can be intimidating as it requires more knowledge about the subject matter. You must make sure that enough literature is available while selecting a topic that offers a good challenge so that you can anticipate not having problems later.
- **Is it practical and doable/achievable/feasible/realistic?** The selected topic must be feasible and practical for study. Sometimes, a researcher identifies a good research topic from the research gaps, but it is complex to implement. Moreover, it is not easy to arrange data from the industry to conduct the research at certain times. Furthermore, there may be a need for more literature. So, the researcher must be aware of the limitations and select a realistic, feasible, and achievable topic to conduct research.
- **Avoid popular topics:** No one should get compelled by popular topics that have been over-researched. On the one hand, you can cite more in your research paper if a popular topic is chosen with the presence of an abundance of information available. On the other hand, readers may not find anything new in your paper as there are possibilities that you might write identical content.

Finally, you must ensure that you have narrowed down your topic several times before choosing the final topic. Make as many changes as required at this step, and you will thank yourself later. You can always consult with your research supervisors and colleagues if you are wondering whether the topic you have chosen will work or not.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Academic publishing is essential for academicians and doctoral students. The initial step of publishing a research work is identifying a research topic. Doctoral students and young researchers need help to select a good topic for research. Sometimes, they choose a topic they need an interest in and the capacity to complete the work on time. A good research topic has three essential attributes including capabilities and relevance. This paper has prescribed a way to identify a good research topic. The paper suggested beginning the process of identifying the research topic by developing a depth of knowledge in the area of interest. The depth can be developed from the literature, beginning from the core to the latest research papers that can be tracked from websites like Google Scholar, Research Gate, etc. Reading a research paper daily can help to improve the depth of knowledge in the selected research field. Thus, the research area can be identified by understanding the significance of the recent research works, identifying issues that still need to be addressed, and reviewing the methods used. Most importantly, researchers need to look for the research gaps. After identifying the research gaps, the researcher can select a topic considering its significance, implications, and feasibility.

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