Student statements on research-based learning

Driven by Curiosity: Choosing Research Topics Based on Interests

Discipline: Pedagogy
Citation: Zitationsweise: Island of Research (2024). Driven by Curiosity Choosing Research Topics Based on Interests: Student Statements.
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Frida (24) wrote her bachelor's thesis on digital learning management systems and shows the importance of finding an interesting research topic.

Finding the research question

Fridas Challenge: When I was trying to decide on a topic for my bachelor thesis in pedagogy, I struggled a lot with narrowing down the subject. I had an interest for motivational psychology, and initially wanted to explore academic self-efficacy and its relation to motivation. This topic in itself is of course far too general, but I really struggled to figure out exactly how I would approach it and make it “researchable”. Looking back, I realize I wasn’t actually passionate about the topic. I had decided to write about motivational psychology because I did well in an exam on the topic in my first year of studying, and I assumed it was a safe choice for my bachelor’s thesis. The problem was, I hadn’t really considered all the other exciting topics the field of pedagogy has to offer.

Fridas Strategy: Eventually, it was my supervisor who encouraged me to explore other options. Being well-versed in media pedagogy, he suggested going in a completely different direction and doing an analysis of our university’s digital learning management system (LMS). This turned out to be a real eye-opener for me. Not only did I get a B on my thesis, but exploring this topic really peaked my interest in digitalization. It’s actually one of the reasons why I chose to pursue a master’s degree in science and technology studies.

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Obtaining a Representative Sample for Empirical Research

Discipline: Sustainable Mobility Management
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ABSTRACT

Venura (32) is pursuing a Master's degree in Sustainable Mobility Management and is currently working on an empirical study as part of his studies. In his statement, he shows how to overcome the challenges of data collection.

Conduct research and collect data

Venuras Challenge: In the course of my empirical research, I encountered a significant challenge in collecting primary data to form a representative sample. The primary data collection method involved conducting an online survey, without any monetary or other incentives to entice participants. Consequently, I initially relied on distributing the survey among my acquaintances, which obviously resulted in a sample heavily skewed towards students. This disproportionate representation raised concerns about the sample's accuracy in reflecting the broader population.

Venuras Strategy: To address this issue, I devised a strategy aimed at diversifying the respondent pool. Recognizing the limitations of my initial approach, I turned to LinkedIn as a platform to engage individuals who were not students. This approach yielded a substantial number of responses from a more diverse demographic. Furthermore, I deliberately gathered as many responses as possible and subsequently applied a systematic filtering process. This process aimed to retain responses that maintained the sample's representativeness while eliminating any outliers. This approach was chosen because it struck a balance between collecting a robust dataset and ensuring that the sample accurately mirrored the population under investigation.

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Collection and data analysis using a new technique unless experience in order to publish a scientific paper

Discipline: Pedagogy
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Amelia (27) (Name has changed) has studied Pedagogy and Research in Education and is currently a PhD student. Her research topics are connected to teaching, learning and assessment in Higher Education, Academic Development in connection with digital competences and Technology Enhanced Assessment and Feedback practices. In her research projects, she finds that interacting with colleagues, other scientists, and her supervisors helps her overcome challenges.

Collection and data analysis

Amelias Challenge: The first time that I had to introduce a new analysis method in my first year PhD program, it was really hard for me. I was so worried about the collection of the data and related analysis process of this unknown procedures and I felt a little bit lost.

Amelias Strategy: First of all, I decided to deeply understand the theoretical part of the methods through an individual study moment. Then, I asked my supervisor for some help and suggestions in order to solve the situation and to develop the analysis. My supervisor suggested me to collaborate with a peer, so a colleague from another University with similar competences: it was crucial for me in order to scaffold collaborative moments. We helped each other, we shared competences, ideas and information and we created our coding system to continue the research. After that, for a specific part of analysis, we decide to find a professional advisor, so we engaged an expert in the field, in order to have feedback and practical/technical suggestion. After a first step of analysis, we checked the work with our supervisor: after the check we wrote down the paper and than we activated another feedback and check process. In this way, we created a virtuous network also for future work. So if you have a methodological problem, first you can enrich your knowledge, than ask to professionals and expert, share and collaborate with peers and create a network.