ASSESSMENT OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND DEPENDABILITY OF PROBLEM STATEMENT IN RESEARCH: A CASE STUDY OF THE LECTURERS IN AKWA IBOM STATE UNIVERSITY

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the guiding principles and dependability of problem statements in research, focusing on lecturers at AkwaIbom State University. Descriptive survey design was adopted to carry out this research in Akwa Ibom State University. The targeted population comprised all lecturers in Akwa Ibom State University. Simple random sampling technique was used to 50 lecturers in Akwa Ibom State University which formed the sample size used to carry out this research. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Guiding Principles and Dependability of Problem Statement Questionnaire (GPDPSQ)". Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.95, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical technique such as descriptive statistics to answer research questions. The result of the data analysis, showed that "Clarity and Precision" among other principles was the most prominent that guided research problem statement. It also revealed that "Justification for research: Addressing a Knowledge Gap" among many others was the highest role that problem statements played in research. The study concluded that a dependable and well-structured problem statement is vital for guiding meaningful research. One of the recommendations made was that lecturers should undergo regular workshops and training sessions that focus on the formulation of clear, researchable, and dependable problem statements.

Keyword: Lecturers, Guiding Principles, Dependability, Research and AkwaIbom State University

INTRODUCTION

In academic research, the problem statement is the nucleus around which every scholarly investigation revolves. It identifies the issue to be studied, frames the research questions, and justifies the significance of the inquiry. Without a clearly articulated and

dependable problem statement, a research study risks veering off course, producing vague conclusions and undermining its contribution to knowledge. According to Grant and Osanloo, (2014), a well-developed problem statement defines the scope, sets the tone, and provides a roadmap for the entire study, making it one of the most critical elements in scholarly writing.

Guiding principles such as clarity, relevance, specificity, and alignment with existing literature serve as benchmarks for evaluating the quality of a problem statement. These principles ensure that research is not only logically sound but also grounded in real-world issues that require evidence-based solutions. Poorly articulated problem statements often stem from vague objectives, limited understanding of the subject matter, or failure to review prior studies thoroughly (Madhu, Hanumanthappa, Geetha and Kota, 2024). For researchers, especially in academic institutions, mastery of these principles is vital for producing credible, high-impact studies.

Dependability, a concept drawn from the qualitative research tradition, refers to the reliability and consistency with which research processes—including problem formulation—are executed. Lal (2025) argue that dependable research is that which can be replicated under similar conditions and still yield comparable insights. In the context of higher education, the dependability of a problem statement ensures that the research findings are not just isolated conclusions but can be used as a springboard for future investigations or policy development.

Lecturers in Nigerian universities, including Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU), play dual roles as educators and researchers. Their ability to craft and mentor students in developing dependable and principled problem statements significantly influences the overall quality of research within the institution. Unfortunately, anecdotal evidence suggests a disparity in research quality due to inconsistencies in how problem statements are conceived and applied across faculties. This calls for a systematic evaluation of the practices and adherence to guiding principles by lecturers in formulating research problems.

This study, therefore, seeks to assess the guiding principles and dependability of problem statements among lecturers at AKSU. It aims to uncover the level of awareness, application, and consistency in problem formulation within the academic community. By focusing on lecturers, the research hopes to identify both the strengths and the gaps in current research practices, ultimately providing recommendations to improve scholarly output and mentorship for future researchers.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Despite its foundational importance, many research endeavors suffer from poorly formulated problem statements, undermining their overall quality and impact. At Akwa Ibom State University, the increasing demand for scholarly research raises concerns about how effectively lecturers adhere to guiding principles in formulating research problems. Inconsistencies in clarity, relevance, and specificity often result in vague or unfocused studies. Furthermore, the dependability of these problem statements—how reliably they reflect real issues and guide inquiry—remains largely unexamined. This gap signals a need for critical assessment. Lecturers may lack adequate skills to frame dependable problem statements, with limited training or institutional support available.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study was to:

- i. Assess the guiding principles of research problem statement
- ii. Examine the roles of problem statement in research

Research Question

The following research questions guided this study:

- i. What are the guiding principles of research problem statement?
- ii. What are the roles of problem statement in research?

LITERATURE REVIEW

CONCEPT OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding principles are foundational statements that inform and direct decision-making, behavior, and practices within organizations, educational frameworks, and various professional fields. They serve as benchmarks for evaluating actions and strategies, ensuring alignment with core values and objectives.

In the context of education, guiding principles play a pivotal role in curriculum development and reform. For instance, Esch (2020) discusses in the context of education, guiding principles play a pivotal role in curriculum development and reform. For instance, Esch (2020) discusses the creation and approval of guiding principles as a key feature in successful general education curriculum reform efforts. These principles govern both the process of reform and the design of the curriculum, providing a framework adaptable to various institutional structures. The creation and approval of guiding principles as a key feature in successful general education curriculum reform efforts. These principles as a key feature in successful general education curriculum reform efforts. These principles are a key feature in successful general education curriculum reform efforts. These principles are a key feature in successful general education curriculum reform efforts are principles as a key feature in successful general education curriculum reform efforts. These principles are a key feature in successful general education curriculum reform efforts. These principles are a key feature in successful general education curriculum reform efforts. These principles are a key feature in successful general education curriculum reform efforts. These principles are a key feature in successful general education curriculum reform efforts. These principles govern both the process of reform and the design of the curriculum, providing a framework adaptable to various institutional structures.

The formulation of guiding principles for curriculum in the twenty-first century is also examined by Zohar (2024), who places a strong emphasis on striking a balance between pedagogical autonomy, thinking skills, and knowledge acquisition. The significance of guiding principles in negotiating the intricacies of contemporary educational systems is underscored by their research. A guiding principle is a fundamental idea or ideal that influences how people or organizations make decisions, behave, and formulate policies. The motivations behind important events, laws, and movements are framed by guiding principles in historical settings, which have an impact on how societies change over time.

The idea and guiding principles of inclusive curricula are further explored by Kunwar (2024), who highlights concepts like equity, access, and social justice while also talking about the holistic nature of such curricula. The study emphasizes how guiding principles can be used to create inclusive learning environments that encourage diversity and active engagement .Company cultures that support corporate growth are established, developed, and maintained by managers and their teams with the aid of guiding principles. Numerous businesses also support the application of these similar ideas to boost output, improve job happiness, and support career advancement. You may increase employee retention and income by improving the effectiveness of your business operations by knowing how to use these concepts in the workplace.

CONCEPT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

The most important part of every study is the research problem statement, which the researcher must craft flawlessly for a number of reasons, such as obtaining funding and increasing readership. A research challenge is a phrase that encapsulates the particular issue that the study is trying to solve. Bisht (2023). A research problem statement is a descriptive statement that explains the problem a researcher is attempting to solve through the study in order to explain to the reader the background and importance of the current investigation.

Several essential elements go into creating a successful research problem statement. A well-written problem description should include the issue's background, importance, and the particular goal of the investigation, claims Younas (2024). The objective outlines the particular goals of the study, the relevance emphasizes the possible contributions to knowledge and practice, and the context places the issue within a larger topic area. The study problem is guaranteed to be both pertinent and researchable thanks to this methodical technique.

Despite its significance, creating strong problem statements is a challenge for many students. According to Wan Abdul Halim (2024), postgraduate students frequently face structural problems, sourcing difficulties, and language proficiency deficits. In order to overcome these challenges, the study highlighted the necessity of methodical training and support by proposing a structured technique to help students create their research issue statements.

To improve the rigor and rationale of studies, Younas (2024) underlined the significance of properly conceiving and developing research topics in the context of mixed methods research. For mixed methods investigations to be clear and coherent they promoted the use of conceptual frameworks to direct the design and identification of research topics.

Formulating research problem statements can be made more difficult by language limitations, especially for non-native English speakers. Al-Hassan (2023) investigated the difficulties Jordanian undergraduate EFL students encounter and discovered weaknesses in the linguistic and academic skills required to create coherent problem statements. The study made clear that in order to improve students' skills in this area, focused interventions are required.

Technological developments provide new ways to assist in the formulation of research problem statements. In order to improve overall clarity and coherence, manage citations, help with terminology and phrasing, and offer real-time language feedback, Wan Abdul Halim (2024) suggested integrating artificial intelligence (AI). The goal of this strategy is to increase the quality of issue statements in postgraduate research and get beyond frequent obstacles.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

To perform relevant research, a well-crafted research problem statement is essential. It establishes the parameters of the investigation, emphasizes the importance of the issue, and guarantees that the goals of the study are precise and attainable. A number of guiding principles ensure clarity, relevance, and practicality while crafting a compelling research problem statement.

1. Clarity and Precision

A research problem must be clearly stated, leaving no room for ambiguity. The language should be direct and specific, ensuring that the issue is easily understood. According to Kareemi. (2025), research clarity allows for effective hypothesis formulation and prevents

misinterpretation. A vague problem statement leads to confusion, making the study difficult to conduct. Every key term should be defined to provide a solid foundation for the research. A clear statement helps researchers stay focused on the study's objectives.

2. Relevance and Significance

The problem must address a critical issue in the field, ensuring its contribution to academic or practical knowledge. As noted by Bougault et al. (2025), research should tackle pressing concerns that impact society, policy, or scientific understanding. The problem should not be trivial or redundant but should add new insights. Significance increases the likelihood of funding and scholarly interest. A strong research problem can influence policy decisions and drive innovation. It should be aligned with real-world applications or theoretical advancements.

3. Feasibility and Manageability

A good research problem is realistic and achievable within available time, resources, and expertise. Researchers must consider practical constraints, including data availability and research scope. If a problem is too broad, it becomes difficult to investigate effectively. Conversely, an overly narrow problem may not provide meaningful conclusions. A well-balanced problem ensures efficient data collection and analysis. Feasibility also considers ethical concerns and regulatory requirements.

4. Originality and Innovation

A research problem should introduce new perspectives, filling gaps in existing literature. Originality ensures that research contributes fresh insights rather than repeating past studies. A novel problem fosters innovation and intellectual progress in the field. It should challenge existing theories or propose new methodologies. Researchers should conduct a thorough literature review to confirm that the issue has not been fully addressed. Addressing emerging trends or technological advancements can increase a study's relevance.

5. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

A research problem must be grounded in a theoretical or conceptual model to guide the study. Reith & Tapia (2025) argue that a strong framework provides structure, ensuring coherence in data interpretation. The theoretical background connects the research to established knowledge, enhancing credibility. Without a solid framework, a study may lack direction and depth. The chosen theory should be relevant to the research problem and methodology. Researchers should justify their framework selection based on prior studies.

THE DEPENDABILITY OF RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

The dependability of a research problem statement is crucial for ensuring the reliability and trustworthiness of qualitative studies. Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of research findings over time and under varying conditions. As explained by Korstjens and Moser (2018), dependability involves providing a detailed account of the research process, enabling others to replicate the study and achieve similar results. This thorough documentation enhances the study's credibility and allows for a comprehensive understanding of the research methodology.

Formulating a clear and concise problem statement is essential for guiding the research process. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a well-defined problem statement sets the

foundation for the study, ensuring that the research questions are focused and relevant. This clarity prevents ambiguity and directs the data collection and analysis processes. A precise problem statement also facilitates the assessment of the study's dependability by providing a clear framework against which the research can be evaluated.

To enhance the dependability of a research problem statement, several strategies can be employed. As noted by Korstjens and Moser (2018), maintaining an audit trail is vital; this involves keeping detailed records of all research decisions and activities, allowing others to follow the research process step by step. Triangulation, which entails using multiple data sources or methods, can also strengthen dependability by cross-verifying findings. Additionally, engaging in peer debriefing provides external checks on the research process, further enhancing its reliability.

The dependability of a research problem statement is fundamental to the integrity of qualitative research. By clearly defining the problem statement and implementing strategies such as maintaining an audit trail, employing triangulation, and engaging in peer debriefing, researchers can ensure that their studies are both reliable and trustworthy. These practices contribute to the overall rigor of the research and enhance the validity of its findings.

THE ROLES OF PROBLEM STATEMENT IN RESEARCH

A well-defined problem statement is the backbone of any research, guiding the entire study and ensuring clarity, relevance, and purpose. It serves as a critical bridge between a researcher's curiosity and the research process, ensuring that the study addresses a specific gap in knowledge. The following is an in-depth exploration of the roles of a problem statement in research, emphasizing its significance in defining research objectives, structuring methodologies, and contributing to knowledge:

1. Defining the Research Scope and Direction

According to M'Mugambi (2025), a clearly defined problem statement is essential in setting the boundaries of a study, ensuring that researchers do not deviate from their primary objectives. Without a well-articulated research problem, studies often become unfocused, leading to data misinterpretation and ineffective conclusions. As explained by Thomas et al. (2025), research that lacks a precise problem statement can result in misreported findings, reducing the credibility of the study. A well-crafted problem statement helps scholars identify specific research questions and hypotheses, ensuring their investigations remain targeted and meaningful.

2. Justification for Research: Addressing a Knowledge Gap

As explained by Omotosho (2025), a strong problem statement provides a compelling justification for research by identifying gaps in existing knowledge. Without it, researchers may struggle to establish the relevance of their study, resulting in redundant investigations. Problem statements are particularly valuable in public policy research, as they help frame economic sustainability issues within a structured and logical framework. By clearly defining the problem, researchers can demonstrate why their study is necessary and how it will contribute to theoretical and practical advancements in their field.

3. Structuring the Research Methodology

A well-defined problem statement is fundamental in shaping the research methodology. The problem statement determines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical tools necessary for investigating the issue at hand. A lack of clarity in the problem statement often leads to disorganized data collection strategies, which ultimately affect the study's validity and reliability. By explicitly stating the research problem, scholars can select the most appropriate methods to ensure accurate and reproducible findings.

4. Enhancing Clarity in Research Objectives

A well-articulated problem statement ensures that research objectives are clear, precise, and measurable. Without a focused problem statement, researchers may formulate objectives that are vague or overly broad, making it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions. Problem statements in medical research play a crucial role in improving patient care by ensuring that clinical investigations remain focused on specific health issues. This structured approach enhances the accuracy of medical diagnoses and treatment strategies.

5. Facilitating Literature Review and Theoretical Framework Development

According to Nagy et al. (2025), a well-defined problem statement directly influences the literature review and theoretical framework of a study. By clarifying the research problem, scholars can identify and engage with the most relevant theories and previous studies, avoiding unnecessary literature. As emphasized by Jansson-Knodell&Rubio-Tapia (2025), in healthcare research, problem statements ensure that theoretical frameworks align with real-world patient concerns, leading to more impactful and applicable findings. Thus, a strong problem statement serves as a foundation for contextualizing new research within established academic debates.

THE CHALLENGES OF ENCOUNTERED BY RESEARCHERS IN THE APPLICATION PROBLEM STATEMENT

Formulating a clear and effective problem statement is a critical step in the research process, yet many researchers encounter significant challenges in this endeavor. Recent studies have identified several common obstacles faced by researchers.

• Structural and Conceptual Challenges

Researchers often struggle with articulating a well-structured problem statement. A study by Wan Abdul Halim. (2024) analyzed problem statements from postgraduate students and found difficulties in organizing content coherently, leading to vague or overly broad statements. The study proposed a structured framework to assist in crafting clearer problem statements.

Language Proficiency Issues

Language barriers can impede the formulation of effective problem statements, especially for non-native English speakers. Al-Hassan et al. (2023) investigated Jordanian undergraduate EFL students and discovered significant grammatical errors and language deficiencies that hindered their ability to clearly articulate research problems. The study emphasized the need for targeted language support to overcome these challenges.

• Difficulty in Identifying Research Gaps

Identifying and articulating research gaps is a common challenge. A study focusing on graduate students in Kenya reported that 68% of participants found it difficult to identify and discuss

research gaps, which is essential for formulating a compelling problem statement. This difficulty often stems from inadequate literature review skills and a lack of exposure to current research trends.

• Overcoming Common Pitfalls

Bappi and Gidado (2024) examined common pitfalls in crafting problem statements, such as lack of clarity, overly broad scope, and misalignment with theoretical frameworks. They proposed practical strategies and theoretical frameworks to help researchers navigate these obstacles and enhance the efficacy of their problem statements.

Challenges in Mixed Methods Research

Younas, (2024) highlighted the complexity of formulating research problems in mixed methods research (MMR). They emphasized the need for a clear articulation of research problems that align with both qualitative and quantitative components, proposing the use of specific conceptual frameworks to guide researchers in this process.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY RESEARCHERS IN THE APPLICATION OF RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

A well-crafted research problem statement is vital to guiding and framing any academic study. Researchers often face difficulties in applying it effectively, but these can be overcome through practical and strategic approaches. Below are key solutions that can strengthen the development and application of a research problem statement:

Sharpen the Focus with Specific Questions: Researchers should refine their problem statement by asking guiding questions such as: What exactly is the issue? Who does it affect? What are the consequences? This process helps in narrowing down the scope and establishing a clear direction. Using structured frameworks like the SMART criteria–Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound–ensures clarity and precision.

Conduct a Thorough Literature Review: A comprehensive review of current and credible literature provides a strong foundation for the research problem. This step reveals what has already been studied and where knowledge gaps exist. Utilizing academic databases, citation tracking tools, and systematic review techniques enhances the depth and relevance of the background research (Ebidor & Ikhide, 2024).

Identify Gaps through Critical Analysis: Researchers should critically analyze existing studies to discover inconsistencies, unanswered questions, or underexplored areas (Bedford, 2025). This can be done by observing emerging trends, analyzing contradictions in findings, or noting areas of limited empirical evidence. Engaging with academic forums, reading recent journal editorials, and consulting experts in the field also aids in identifying genuine research gaps.

Ensure Alignment with Objectives and Methods: Consistency is essential. The research problem should logically lead to the research objectives, questions, and methodology. Using a logical framework—where the problem gives rise to objectives, which in turn shape the research questions and inform the method—can help ensure coherence throughout the study.

Connect to Real-World Relevance: A strong problem statement should reflect both academic significance and practical value. Researchers can enhance real-world relevance by interacting with stakeholders such as community leaders, industry professionals, or policymakers (Alazmi

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and Alazmi, 2023). This ensures that the problem addresses a timely and meaningful issue with potential for real impact.

Improve Clarity of Expression: Articulation is key. Researchers should aim for clear, concise, and logical language when writing the problem statement. Practicing academic writing, seeking peer or mentor feedback, and reviewing high-quality examples can improve both structure and style. Avoiding jargon and ensuring that each component of the statement builds logically from the last enhances readability and understanding.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey design was adopted to carry out this research in Akwa Ibom State University. The targeted population for the study comprised all lecturers in Akwa Ibom State University. Simple random sampling technique was used to 50 lecturers in Akwa Ibom State University which formed the sample size used to carry out this research. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Guiding Principles and Dependability of Problem Statement Questionnaire (GPDPSQ)". Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.95, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical technique such as descriptive statistics to answer research questions.

PRINCIPLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Clarity and Precision	14	28
Relevance and Significance	8	16
Feasibility and Manageability	6	12
Originality and Innovation	12	24
Theoretical and conceptual framewor	k 10	20
TOTAL	50	100%
** The highest percentage freque	ency	

Table 1. Percentage Analysis of the Guiding Principles of Research Problem Statement

The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field Survey

The above table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the guiding principles of research problem. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the guiding principles tagged "Clarity and Precision" 14(28%) was the most prominent principle that guide research problem statement, while the least was "Feasibility and Manageability" 6(12%). The result therefore is in agreement with the research findings of Kareemi. (2025), research clarity allows for effective hypothesis formulation and prevents misinterpretation.

Research Questions 2: The research question sought to find out the roles of problem statement in research. To answer the research question, percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 2).

Table 2: Percentage Analysis of the Roles of Problem Statement in Research				
ROLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE		
	2	10		
Defining the Research Scope and Direction	6	12		
Justification for Research: Addressing a Knowledge Ga	ap 20	40		
Structuring the Research Methodology	4	8		
Enhancing Clarity in Research Objectives	13	26		
Facilitating Literature Review and Theoretical Framew	vork			
Development	7	14		
TOTAL	50	100%		

** The highest percentage frequency

* The least percentage frequency

The above table 2 presents the percentage analysis of the roles of problem statement in research. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the role tagged "Justification for research: Addressing a Knowledge Gap" 20(40%) was rated as the highest role that problem statement played in research, while "Structuring the Research Methodology" 4(8%) was rated the least. The result therefore is in agreement with the research findings of M'Mugambi (2025), a clearly defined problem statement is essential in setting the boundaries of a study, ensuring that researchers do not deviate from their primary objectives.

Conclusion

A dependable and well-structured problem statement is vital for guiding meaningful research. The result of the data analysis, showed that "Clarity and Precision" among other principles is the most prominent that guided research problem statement. It also revealed that "Justification for research: Addressing a Knowledge Gap" among many others is the highest role that problem statement played in research. At Akwa Ibom State University, lecturers play a key role in shaping research quality, making it crucial to assess how effectively they apply the guiding principles of problem formulation. Such evaluation not only highlights the strengths and weaknesses in current academic practices but also supports the development of more precise and impactful research. By incorporating digital tools and drawing on experienced scholars' methodologies, the university can improve research training and outputs. Strengthening problem statement practices ultimately fosters more rigorous and relevant academic contributions.

Recommendations

- 1. Lecturers should undergo regular workshops and training sessions that focus on the formulation of clear, researchable, and dependable problem statements. This will enhance their ability to guide students effectively and improve the quality of their own scholarly outputs.
- 2. The university should encourage and support the use of digital tools such as academic databases, plagiarism checkers, and AI-assisted research assistants to help lecturers formulate accurate and verifiable problem statements that are aligned with current knowledge gaps.
- 3. A structured peer-review system should be put in place within departments, where problem statements in research proposals are reviewed by colleagues to ensure clarity, relevance, and dependability before final approval or submission.

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