The requirement for a Ph.D. is a thesis that requires original contribution and is more than just accumulation of the facts. There needs to be clear theoretical content – a question to which an answer is being sought. The question will usually address general issues rather than a specific problem so that the answer has wide range applicability. A research proposal focuses on a perplexing and significant question that emerges from the literature in a given field. The gaps or unanswered questions in the extant literature provide a rationale and finally, the justification for pursuing our particular line of research. It’s our responsibility to determine what expectation our advisor and/or our committee have for developing a research problem.

The problem should be sufficiently limited that is capable of being tackled within a reasonable time. The area and scope of the research area must be defined as precisely as possible.

Some people say choosing a research problem is like choosing a husband/wife, it has to be the one or even more important than that.

In order to generate enough knowledge to know if we are interested in a research area, we have to dig into it. Hopefully we are not too deep in before we realize we are digging in the wrong spot. A good problem is an issue or difficulty of some significance, priority whose investigation will make a useful contribution to knowledge.

Our understanding and conceptualization may change as we collect data. The proposal is not cast in cement. Instead, it’s a blueprint. It is a map, which will guide us in data collection and analysis journey. The more thoroughly we have thought about the problems in advance the better for us.