Research is a systematic investigative process employed to increase or revise current knowledge by discovering new facts. It can be divided into two general categories: (1) Basic research, which is inquiry aimed at increasing scientific knowledge, and (2) Applied research, which is effort aimed at using basic research for solving problems or developing new processes, products, or techniques.

The first and most important step in any research is to identify and delineate the research problem: that is, what the researcher wants to solve and what questions he/she wishes to answer. A research problem may be defined as an area of concern, a gap in the existing knowledge, or a deviation in the norm or standard that points to the need for further understanding and investigation. Although many problems turn out to have several solutions (the means to close the gap or correct the deviation), difficulties arise where such means are either not obvious or are not immediately available. This then necessitates some research to reach a viable solution.

A ***statement of the problem*** is used in research work as a claim that outlines the problem addressed by a study. The statement of the problem briefly addresses the question: What is the problem that the research will address?

**What are the goals of a statement of the problem?**

The ultimate goal of a statement of the problem is to transform a generalized problem (something that bothers you; a perceived lack) into a targeted, well-defined problem; one that can be resolved through focused research and careful decision-making.

Writing a statement of the problem should help you clearly identify the purpose of the research project you will propose. Often, the statement of the problem will also serve as the basis for the introductory section of your final proposal, directing your reader’s attention quickly to the issues that your proposed project will address and providing the reader with a concise statement of the proposed project itself.

A statement of problem need not be long and elaborate: one page is more than enough for a good statement of problem.

**What are the key characteristics of a statement of the problem?**

1. A good research problem should have the following characteristics:
2. It should address a gap in knowledge.
3. It should be significant enough to contribute to the existing body of research
4. It should lead to further research
5. The problem should render itself to investigation through collection of data
6. It should be of interest to the researcher and suit his/her skills, time, and resources
7. The approach towards solving the problem should be ethical

**What is the format for writing a statement of the problem?**

A persuasive statement of problem is usually written in three parts:

**Part A (The ideal):** Describes a desired goal or ideal situation; explains how things should be.

**Part B (The reality):** Describes a condition that prevents the goal, state, or value in Part A from being achieved or realized at this time; explains how the current situation falls short of the goal or ideal.

**Part C** **(The consequences):** Identifies the way you propose to improve the current situation and move it closer to the goal or ideal.

Here is an example:

**Example 1**

**Part A:**According to the XY university mission statement, the university seeks to provide students with a safe, healthy learning environment. Dormitories are one important aspect of that learning environment, since 55% of XY students live in campus dorms and most of these students spend a significant amount of time working in their dorm rooms.

However,

**Part B:** Students living in dorms A B C, and D currently do not have air conditioning units, and during the hot seasons, it is common for room temperatures to exceed 80 degrees F. Many students report that they are unable to do homework in their dorm rooms. Others report having problems sleeping because of the humidity and temperature. The rooms are not only unhealthy, but they inhibit student productivity and academic achievement.

**Part C:** In response to this problem, our study proposes to investigate several options for making the dorms more hospitable. We plan to carry out an all-inclusive participatory investigation into options for purchasing air conditioners (university-funded; student-subsidized) and different types of air conditioning systems. We will also consider less expensive ways to mitigate some or all of the problems noted above (such as creating climate-controlled dorm lounges and equipping them with better study areas and computing space).

Here is a simple four-step guide to writing a statement of the problem:

**Step 1** (**Statement 1**): Describe a goal or desired state of a given situation, phenomenon etc. This will build the ideal situation (what should be, what is expected or desired)

**Step 2** (S**tatement 2**): Describe a condition that prevents the goal, state, or value discussed in Step 1 from being achieved or realized at the present time. This will build the reality or the situation as it is and establish a gap between what ought to be and what is.

**Step 3:**Connect steps 1 and 2 using a connecting term such as "but," "however," “unfortunately,” or “in spite of.”

**Step 4** (**Statement 3**): Using specific details, show how the situation in step 2 contains little promise of improvement unless something is done. Then emphasize the benefits of research by projecting the consequences of possible solutions.

Here are some examples of how you can write a statement of the problem using the steps mentioned above:

**Example 2**

**Step 1 (Statement 1)**

The government of Kenya has a goal to industrialize the nation by the year 2030 (quote). In this regard it has encouraged growth-oriented micro and small enterprises (MSEs) that should graduate into medium and large enterprises capable of contributing to the industrialization goal. There are several sessional papers (quote/cite) that contain specific measures to encourage and support MSEs.

**Step 2 and 3 (Statement 2)**

Despite the said government efforts, there is slow growth of micro into small enterprises and even slower growth of small into medium scale enterprises (quote, show statistics). The government has officially acknowledged that there exists a “missing middle” in Kenya meaning that there is a gap between small and large enterprises in the country (cite, quote).

**Step 4 (Statement 3)**

Should the “missing middle” gap persist, the industrialization goal may be difficult to achieve. A need therefore arises to investigate why there is a persistent “missing middle” despite government efforts.

**Example 3**

**Statement 1**

In order to accomplish their missions, public universities need motivated workforces.

**Statement 2**

There are, however, frequent and severe disciplinary actions, absenteeism, as well as various forms of unrest in public universities which affect the accomplishment of the set missions. Our preliminary investigation reveals that both non-management and management staff are under motivated.

**Statement 3**

Without effective motivational packages and procedures, the said vices are likely to continue and retard the achievement of the universities’ missions.

Thus, there is a need to examine the public universities’ motivation systems and procedures, which is the aim of the proposed research.

**Example 4**

**Statement 1**

The Ministry of Youth is dedicated to allocating enterprise development funds to both the youth and women. These funds are made available in order to start entrepreneurial ventures that create and expand employment. (Provide relevant statistics and quote)

**Statement 2**

One of the main focuses of the ministry is consistency. Unfortunately, consistency in allocating funds to the next generation of recipients requires prior knowledge of previous allocations and established practices. The current continuous disbursement method does not allow for adequate analysis of previous disbursements before a current disbursement is done.

**Statement 3**

Continuing with this current disbursement method prevents consistency and causes decisions to become grossly political, which in turn inhibits the achievement of the goals of the funds. Developing a more informed disbursement system could help better implement the consistency focus of the ministry and at the same time help the ministry better monitor and evaluate its funds.

This proposed research aspires to explore options for a new funds disbursement system that would focus on consistency. To do this, the researcher will carry out a full stakeholder analysis and use it to propose appropriate policy interventions.

**Another approach**

Another way to write a statement of the problem is to use a template. Here is a simple template which might be useful for researchers:

There is a problem in ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(e.g. organization or situation where problem is occurring). Despite \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(efforts to prevent or deter), \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(something undesirable or unexpected) is occurring (provide evidence). This problem has negatively affected\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(victims of the problem) because\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. A possible cause of this problem is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Perhaps a study which investigates\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ by a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(paradigm/method) could help resolve the situation.

Here is a sample statement of the problem that has been created using the above template:

An established trend in the small business start-up financing in Kenya is to establish funds. Some of these funds include the youth fund and women fund. These funds have helped improve the rate of start-ups in the country. However, after the start-up stage, the ventures start developing problems. First, they face problems in management which lead to a marketing problem and eventually to stagnation and early exit.

A study by the Institute of Development Studies (RoK, 2004) revealed that only 38% of the businesses are expanding while 58% have not added workers. According to the survey, more enterprises are likely to close in their first three years of operation. Four years later the same institute conducted another study in Central Kenya. This study revealed that 57% of small businesses are in stagnation with only 33% of them showing some level of growth.

In our current project, we propose to examine factors that have an impact on small business sustainability. We will employ both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather both primary and secondary data and information with the objective of determining success factors for the growth of small business in Kenya.

Specifically, we shall employ the product life cycle (PLC) model to identify the needs of a small business at the various stages of the PLC