

## **Aren't Research Questions and Hypotheses Indispensable for Literature Research, too?**

### **Abstract**

Many English literature researchers in India commonly operate under the assumption that they lack a specific research methodology exclusive to literature studies, apart from what is outlined in the regularly updated *MLA Handbook*. Consequently, their dissertations often resemble lengthy college essays divided into five chapters, with limited emphasis on the Introduction and Conclusion chapters. The concluding section is routinely labeled as 'Summation.' These researchers typically overlook identifying knowledge gaps, even during the literature review phase, and often neglect the framing of research questions and formulation of hypotheses. There seems to be a prevailing belief that literary research is inherently distinct, exempting them from adopting methodologies employed in other disciplines. This paper explores the reasons behind the development of an anti-methodological stance among literature researchers, utilizing a structured questionnaire administered to PhD holders in literature. The findings suggest that this attitude stems from a steadfast adherence to the *MLA Handbook*, which prioritizes documentation procedures over methodological considerations. The paper recommends that literature scholars should embrace books and stylesheets designed for general research as the fundamental objectives of research in any discipline are the pursuit of truth and the appropriate means to achieve it.

**Keywords:** research problem, research objectives, thesis statement, quality research, academic navigation

### **1. Introduction**

Until recently, discussions on research methods in English studies were not commonplace. (Correa & Owens, 1998) Previously, there was no perception that understanding the research process or recognizing how one conducted it could impact the results. Research methods and skills were separated from the academic investigation of the subject, viewed more as a necessary inconvenience than a beneficial asset. Practitioners of these methods did not openly discuss their approaches to attain remarkable and paradigm-shifting results. It is still believed that "A lot of research methods can't be taught. You pick it up by doing it." (William 2003: 27) Supervisors lack a background in research training, and there is a prevailing belief that PhD dissertations in English do not necessitate a methodology section. (Griffin, 2007) The *MLA Handbook*, which is designated as the primary text for the research methodology course at the postgraduate and

doctoral levels, does not address research skills, methods, or methodology. Its emphasis lies solely on documentation skills and procedures.

The entire landscape underwent a significant transformation at the turn of the century. In November 2002, the English Subject Centre released a research report titled *Postgraduate Training in Research Methods: Current Practice and Future Needs in English* (Williams, 2003). This report closely followed the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) *Postgraduate Review* published in January 2002. It recommended the explicit and mandatory inclusion of research training requirements for research grants. The University Grants Commission (UGC) in India has now made it compulsory as part of coursework for PhD scholars across all disciplines. Besides, international indexed journals now require the inclusion of research methods in manuscripts, and international conferences have started scrutinizing scholars' research approaches more closely. In the words of Griffin (2007: 3), research methods became a meta-discourse on “how do what we do and why.”

Griffin makes a clear distinction among research skills, research methods, and research methodology. Research skills pertain to the techniques for managing material, methods involve the execution of research, and methodologies focus on the perspectives applied to the work. While Williams (2003) provides an exhaustive list of research skills, neither Griffin (2007) nor Williams addresses the aspects of framing research questions and formulating hypotheses. Of course, Griffin acknowledges that “knowledge of a range of research methods enables students to ask different research questions... it might generate divergent and innovative work.” (4-5) Fortunately, Owens (2014) contends that providing direction to research involves formulating a set of questions the researcher aims to answer or problems they seek to solve. According to Owens, research is not merely about collecting information without purpose; rather, information is gathered to address specific questions. To transform a topic into a persuasive argument, Owens offers ten suggestions, emphasizing that a compelling thesis takes the shape of an argument, requiring evidence analysis to establish or prove a point.

The review of the literature, research questions, and research hypotheses constitute integral elements of the research design. Research questions emerge after identifying the knowledge gap at the conclusion of the literature review. Subsequently, research hypotheses are formulated. Quadri (2010: 74-77) addresses the concept of research questions and hypotheses in language and literary theses, but he does not explicitly specify their applicability to literary research, lacking specific examples. Meanwhile, in the realm of literary studies in India, there is a prevailing belief among researchers that the creation of hypotheses/research questions is unnecessary or discouraged when it comes to examining literary texts. The argument is that hypotheses/research

questions are not typically a necessary component of English literature research articles and that in scientific research, hypotheses are used to make testable predictions about the outcomes of experiments or observations.

In contrast, literary analysis and interpretation often do not involve the formulation of research questions and hypotheses in the same way that empirical scientific research does. Usually, literature research articles often focus on critical analysis, interpretation, and discussion of literary works, themes, characters, and literary techniques. These articles may explore the historical and cultural context of a work, examine its literary qualities, or offer new insights and interpretations. Some assume that hypotheses or research questions may be included, particularly in certain subfields of literary studies. For example, if one is conducting a quantitative or empirical analysis of literary texts, such as a study of reader response or the impact of specific literary techniques, they may then formulate hypotheses to guide their research and data analysis. Similarly, in some interdisciplinary studies that combine literature with other fields like psychology or linguistics, hypotheses can be relevant.

However, researchers in the field of literature, like in many other academic disciplines, can and, therefore should formulate initial hypotheses or research questions as a starting point for their research. These hypotheses or questions serve as a framework for the investigation and analysis of literary texts. Researchers can use them to guide their exploration of the text and to help structure their research. These initial/working hypotheses or questions can take various forms and may relate to different aspects of literary analysis. For example, a researcher may develop a hypothesis or question about the themes, character development, narrative structure, or symbolism in a literary work. They may then use these hypotheses to frame their analysis, gather evidence from the text, and develop their arguments and interpretations.

While hypotheses or research questions are a common and valuable part of the research process in literature, they may not always be explicitly stated in the final research article. Instead, the findings, analysis, and interpretations based on those initial hypotheses or questions are presented. Though the focus is often on critical analysis, interpretation, and understanding the complexities of the text, rather than conducting experiments to prove or disprove specific hypotheses, the formulation of initial hypotheses or research questions is a crucial step in the research process in literature. After all, it helps researchers to focus their enquiries and frame their analysis of literary works.

## **2. Method**

Limited research articles and books focus on the significance of research methodology in the context of English literature. Nevertheless, the researcher diligently sought and accessed the existing literature within this domain.

### **2.1 Review of the Related Literature**

Crafting research questions marks the intricate initiation of a research project. The selection of these questions often stands out as one of the most challenging aspects of the entire process. (White, 2009). At the same time, they must be answerable (Andrews, 2003) in the sense that they “must have the potential for being answered in the project to be undertaken.” (3) Hence, their formulation may require a considerable amount of time. Moreover, initiating a research project does not commence with the generation and development of research questions; rather, research questions emerge organically from a thorough literature review. However, Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) argue that the topic of research questions is often overlooked in many discussions on how to create high-quality research. At the same time, they emphasize that critical examination and questioning of established assumptions in a field are pivotal elements in constructing research questions. The establishment and exploration of new assumptions not only unlock the potential for generating more engaging and impactful research but also facilitate the development of novel theoretical concepts.

Literature research falls within the realm of qualitative research. It delves into the intricacies of human interaction, which are complex and nuanced. Qualitative research is well-suited for capturing and understanding this kind of complexity. Keyton (2015) claims that the majority of qualitative research questions center around a particular context of interaction, making them specific to certain types of communication or communicators. These questions often commence with ‘how’ and ‘what.’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) Through these openings, researchers can enquire to uncover, elucidate, or comprehend various aspects, investigate a process, or describe the experiences of the involved characters.

### **2.2 Research Questions**

The current investigation was directed by the subsequent research queries:

1. What kind of qualitative research is literary research?
2. How are research hypotheses and research questions related?
3. How different are research hypotheses from axioms?
4. How natural are hypotheses in literature research?

### **2.3 Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are framed for further exploration on the relevance of research questions and hypotheses:

1. Research questions empower researchers to concentrate on their enquiries, regardless of the field of investigation.
2. Literary researchers universally develop preliminary hypotheses regarding the themes, characters, or ideologies explored or advocated in literary texts.

## 2.4 Questionnaire

The researcher surveyed assistant/associate professors with completed PhD degrees in English literature. A Likert-scale questionnaire with ten statements, featuring two response options (Yes or No), was employed, and the analysis utilized simple percentage calculations as the statistical method. The questionnaire was distributed using Google Forms from 14 to 18 November 2023. The questionnaire was developed using the researcher's experience as a research supervisor and insights from existing literature in Arts and Humanities. Before finalization, a pilot study was conducted online among randomly selected colleagues from the state of Tamil Nadu.

### list 1: Scoring responses

S.No	Statement	Yes	No
1	My research supervisor recommended the formulation of research questions	68.4	31.6
2	After reading the author and selecting texts, I developed some preliminary hypotheses.	96.8	3.2
3	The MLA Handbook rarely supports the use of research questions and hypotheses.	57.9	42.1
4	I understand the reciprocal relationship between research questions and hypotheses.	92.6	7.4
5	In the concluding chapter, I evaluated the extent to which the study addressed the research questions.	96.8	3.2
6	The concluding chapter validated the initial hypotheses proposed in the introduction.	95.8	4.2
7	I critically analyzed the texts to identify gaps within them.	94.7	5.3
8	My research centered on interpreting the textual stance of the author.	75.8	24.2
9	Critical interpretation aims to avoid mere repetition of the text's content.	92.6	7.4
10	Readerly texts are inadequate for effective literary research.	69.5	30.5
	Average	<b>84</b>	16

## 2.5 Participants

Participants for the study were chosen through a combination of random selection and snowball sampling methods. The exact number of subjects contacted is uncertain due to the utilization of the snowball sampling method online. Nevertheless, the total number of respondents amounted to 95. The average teaching experience of the respondents is 14 years and 11 months, with a range spanning from 0 to 45 years. The median teaching experience of the respondents is 14. Given that the mean and median of the experience dataset are identical, it indicates an even distribution from the smallest to the highest values. Individuals who indicated 0 years of experience have recently commenced their careers while those with experience ranging from 36

to 45 years are typically reemployed upon superannuation, particularly in the self-financed streams of aided colleges. Participants included individuals of both genders, employed in government colleges, aided colleges, self-financed streams within aided colleges, as well as self-financed private colleges. In addition, some respondents were associated with state universities and private universities. The following tables illustrate the personal profile of the respondents:

Table 1: Respondents' Teaching Experience

Range In years	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36+	Total
Respondents	20	14	23	17	10	6	3	2	95

Table 2: Mean & Median of Respondents' Teaching Experience

	Year	Month
Mean	14	11
Median	14	

Table 3: Type of Institutions where Respondents are Employed

S.NO	Type	Number
1	Autonomous Institutions	50
2	Institutions Affiliated to Universities	34
3	State Universities	6
4	Central Universities	2
5	Private Universities	3
	Total	95

Table 4: Respondents' Sex

Sex	Female	Male	Total
	73	22	95

### 3 Results

The data presented in the following charts reveal intriguing yet paradoxical findings. On average, the percentage of positive responses to the ten statements related to the framing of research questions, the formulation of hypotheses, and their functional roles in English literature research is 84. This paradox arises because, despite acknowledging these principles, most respondents do not incorporate them into their research and teaching on research methodology. This is affirmed by the researcher's extensive background as an experienced teacher of research methodology courses, the Head of the Research Department of English at The American College, Madurai, India, a supervisor for over twenty PhD scholars, and a guide for 65 MPhil scholars. Besides, the researcher serves as an accredited adjudicator for English PhD dissertations across a dozen Indian universities.

Moreover, this paradoxical situation may be attributed to the heightened awareness fostered by the UGC, which has made components such as literature review, research objectives, research questions, and hypotheses and their validation mandatory in research methodology coursework for doctoral programs. Further, the UGC emphasizes publication in journals indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and the CARE List, all of which require the inclusion of these components in literature manuscripts. Consequently, numerous scholars find themselves unable to submit their PhD dissertations for evaluation and conferment while many educators face challenges in seeking approval from universities to serve as research supervisors. Indian universities mandate the publication of one or two articles in journals indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and the CARE List as a prerequisite.

Chart 1

My research supervisor recommended the formulation of research questions.  
51 responses



Chart 2

After reading the author and selecting texts, I developed some preliminary hypotheses.  
88 responses



Chart 4

I understand the reciprocal relationship between research questions and hypotheses.  
85 responses



Chart 3

The M.A. Handbook only supports the use of research questions and hypotheses.  
56 responses



Chart 5

In the concluding chapter, I evaluated the extent to which the study addressed the research questions.  
30 responses



Chart 6 :

The concluding chapter validated the initial hypotheses proposed in the introduction.  
30 responses



Chart 7

I critically analyzed the texts to identify gaps within them.  
33 responses



Chart 8

My research centered on interpreting the textual stance of the author.  
33 responses



Chart 9

Critical interpretation aims to avoid mere repetition of the text's content.  
33 responses



chart 10

Reading texts are inadequate for effective literary research.  
33 responses



The findings are not just perplexing but also paradoxical. Despite 68.4% asserting that their supervisors recommended formulating research questions, a considerable number fail to follow through, and the reasons for this deviation remain elusive. Another discrepancy emerges with 42.1% stating that the *MLA Handbook* supports the use of research questions and hypotheses, a claim contradicted by the actual content of the handbook. This suggests a gap in scholars'

thorough reading of the material. Although a significant 96.8% acknowledge forming working hypotheses after reading selected texts, the integration of these hypotheses into their theses or articles appears lacking. Moreover, while 96% claim to assess the fulfillment of research questions and hypotheses in the concluding sections of their work, this does not align with their actual practice. The survey reveals a striking inconsistency, where 94.7% assert critical reading to identify gaps and yet 75.8% admit to interpreting only the textual stance of the writer. Further, 92.6% affirm that interpretation goes beyond repeating the text's content, but ironically, 30.5% believe readerly texts suffice for effective literary research.

When randomly approached, researcher scholars revealed that a majority of their guides do not guide them towards framing research questions and formulating hypotheses. Consequently, they expressed a lack of awareness regarding these essential components. Many admitted to being unsure about the integral parts of introduction and conclusion chapters, attributing their uncertainty to the perceived silence of the *MLA Handbook* on these aspects. This suggests that, despite being cognizant of the expectations set by international publishing houses and the UGC-mandated methodology course, scholars and supervisors hesitate to incorporate these practices into their work due to the absence of clear guidance from what they consider a crucial authority—the *MLA Handbook*.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Literary Research as Qualitative Research

Literary research, as a form of qualitative research, falls under the category of “qualitative content analysis” or “textual analysis.” It is a research method that focuses on the in-depth analysis and interpretation of primary and secondary written sources. Traditionally, literary research primarily involves the analysis of literary texts, which can include novels, poems, plays, essays, and other forms of written expression. Researchers closely examine the language, themes, characters, and stylistic elements within the text. It is interpretive and seeks to understand the meaning and significance of literary works within their cultural, historical, and social contexts. It deals with qualitative data derived from the text itself. It aims to generate insights and interpretations based on the text's content and context. Researchers explore the nuances and complexities of the text, often considering multiple interpretations. They extract data from the text through close reading, thematic analysis, and other qualitative methods. They often acknowledge their subjectivity and engage in reflexive practices, recognizing that their interpretations are influenced by their own perspectives and experiences.

Literary research often draws upon various literary theories and critical frameworks to guide the analysis. These theories help researchers explore themes, symbolism, narrative structures, and

other elements within the text. Researchers may also employ narrative and discourse analysis techniques to examine how the text constructs meaning, conveys ideologies, or represents cultural and societal discourses. Literary research can contribute to the development of literary theories, critical perspectives, and deeper understandings of the cultural and historical implications of literature.

#### **4.2 Importance of Framing Research Questions in Literary Research**

Framing research questions is an essential and indisputable aspect of literary research. Research questions are indeed a valuable and often necessary component of literary research. They help to focus and guide the inquiry, providing a clear sense of what the researcher aims to explore or understand within a particular literary context. They define the purpose and objectives of the study, making it clear what the researcher intends to investigate or analyze in a literary work. They help establish the boundaries of the research. They also provide a direction for the research, helping the researcher to concentrate on specific aspects of the text, such as themes, characters, narrative techniques, historical context, or any other elements of interest.

Literary research often involves interpretation, and research questions prompt the exploration of different interpretations and perspectives within a literary work. They encourage a deeper analysis of the text. They also allow for a flexible and open-ended approach to inquiry, particularly in qualitative research. They can be designed to align with specific literary theories or critical frameworks, which can guide the analysis and interpretation of the text. Researchers can adjust or refine their questions as they progress and make new discoveries in the text.

#### **4.3 Research Hypotheses in Literary Research**

Researchers in the field of English literature, like in many other academic disciplines, often formulate initial hypotheses as a starting point for their research. These hypotheses serve as a framework for the investigation and analysis of literary texts. They often help structure research thesis. These initial hypotheses can take various forms and may related to different aspects of literary analysis. They can be about the themes, character development, narrative structure, symbolism, or questioning/reinforcing/promoting existing ideologies in society. Researchers then proceed to frame their analysis, gather evidence from the text(s), and develop their arguments and interpretations. The research process may be more focused on generating insights and interpretations rather than conducting experiments. For example, in the hypothesis, “The consistent use of iambic pentameter in Shakespeare's tragedies serves to heighten the emotional intensity and dramatic impact of key soliloquies, contributing to a more immersive experience for the audience,” the independent variable is the “consistent use of iambic pentameter.” The researcher is suggesting that this aspect is a variable that can be systematically observed and

analyzed. The dependent variable is the outcome or effect that is being measured. In this hypothesis, the dependent variable is the "heightening of emotional intensity and dramatic impact of key soliloquies," and by extension, the "more immersive experience for the audience." In simpler terms, the hypothesis suggests that the way iambic pentameter is used (independent variable) influences the emotional impact and immersive experience for the audience (dependent variable). The researcher is proposing a relationship between the manipulation of iambic pentameter and its impact on the audience's experience of Shakespeare's tragedies.

#### **4.4 Complementary between Research Questions and Research Hypotheses**

Research questions and research hypotheses are closely related in the research process, as they serve as fundamental elements that guide the design and execution of a research study. However, they have distinct characteristics and functions. Research questions are open-ended inquiries that express what the researcher wants to understand, explore, or investigate within a research study. They are often framed as questions that do not make specific predictions or claims but instead seek to uncover knowledge or insights about a particular topic. They are common in qualitative research, as they allow for a more flexible and exploratory approach to inquiry. On the other hand, Research hypotheses are testable statements or educated guesses about the expected outcomes or relationships between variables in a research study. They are more specific and assertive than research questions. They are often used to make predictions and guide the collection of empirical evidence.

The relationship between research questions and research hypotheses can be formulated as follows: Research questions are typically formulated at the beginning of the research process to provide a broad sense of the topics or issues to be explored. Hypotheses, on the other hand, are formulated when the researcher wants to make specific predictions or test certain relationships. Research questions can lead to the development of research hypotheses. When researchers delve into the literature or conduct exploratory research, they may develop hypotheses as they gain a deeper understanding of the topic. The choice between research questions and hypotheses often informs the research design. If the research aims to test specific relationships or make predictions, hypotheses may be more appropriate. If the research is exploratory or qualitative in nature, research questions are commonly used.

Hypotheses guide the collection of data and the selection of appropriate statistical analyses. Research questions, on the other hand, guide data collection and qualitative analysis methods. Hypotheses often reflect specific research questions or expected outcomes. Researchers may choose writers and literary works that align with these hypotheses, as they provide a clear focus for the study. For example, if a hypothesis posits that there is a relationship between a particular

writing style and reader engagement, the researcher may select writers who are known for their distinct writing styles. Writers and their works are chosen based on their relevance to the hypotheses being tested. Researchers select writers and texts that are expected to provide insights into the specific relationships or variables under investigation.

#### **4.5 Relationship between Hypotheses and Axioms in Literary Research**

Hypotheses and axioms are not the same in qualitative research; they are distinct concepts with different roles and meanings in the research process. In research, hypotheses are statements that propose a relationship or an expected outcome that can be tested through empirical investigation. On the other hand, axioms are fundamental principles or self-evident truths that serve as foundational assumptions or starting points in a particular field of study. For example, “The nature of humanity is complex, and the internal struggle between duty, morality, and personal desires is a pervasive theme.” This statement reflects a common interpretation of *Hamlet*, emphasizing the intricate and multifaceted nature of human existence, particularly as seen through the protagonist's internal conflicts.

Hypotheses are typically associated with quantitative research, where researchers collect and analyze numerical data to test their hypotheses; whereas axioms are not typically used in the context of empirical qualitative research but are more commonly associated with mathematical and philosophical contexts. Hypotheses serve as testable propositions that guide the research process and help researchers draw conclusions based on evidence. In qualitative research, researchers may work with theoretical frameworks or foundational concepts, but these are not typically referred to as axioms. Instead, they often draw on existing theories, concepts, or paradigms to inform their research questions and guide their analysis. For example, “Love and passion can be powerful, transformative forces, but they are also susceptible to external influences and societal pressures.” This reflects a theme often explored in *Romeo and Juliet*, where the intensity of the young lovers' emotions is contrasted with the societal forces that ultimately contribute to their tragic fate.

#### **4.6 Natural Integration of Hypotheses into Literary Research**

At the same time, many believe that hypotheses are not as prevalent in research involving literary texts as they are in some other scientific disciplines. Literary research often takes an interpretive and exploratory approach, seeking to understand and analyze the complexities of literature rather than testing specific hypotheses. The nature of literary texts, which are rich in symbolism, nuance, and subjectivity, tends to align more with qualitative research methods. The conventional literary researchers claim the following reasons for hypotheses being less common in literary research:

Literary research is often focused on interpretation, exploring the meanings, themes, and artistic qualities of texts. The goal is to understand and appreciate the nuances rather than to test specific relationships or predictions. In addition, literary analysis recognizes the subjectivity of interpretation. Different readers may derive varied meanings from the same text, and there is an acknowledgment that multiple interpretations can coexist. Moreover, literary researchers commonly use qualitative research methods, such as close reading, thematic analysis, and discourse analysis. These methods are more conducive to exploring the depth and complexity of literary works rather than testing hypotheses.

Again, literary studies often involve exploratory research questions that prompt a broad investigation into themes, characters, or narrative techniques. This aligns with an open-ended, inquisitive approach rather than a hypothesis-driven one. Understanding the cultural and historical context of literary works is often a central concern. Researchers may explore how a text reflects or challenges the values of its time rather than testing specific hypotheses. However, the choice between hypothesis-driven or exploratory research depends on the research goals, questions, and the nature of the literary analysis being conducted.

#### **4.7 Findings of the Study**

The study exploring the essential role of research questions and hypotheses in literary research has yielded the following key findings:

1. Research questions help to *define the scope and focus* of the study. Well-crafted research questions provide a clear direction for the research, outlining the specific aspects of literary texts that are being explored. Hypotheses serve as testable propositions derived from the research questions. They contribute to the clarity of the research by providing a framework for investigation.
2. Research questions often arise from gaps or debates in existing literature. By formulating research questions, scholars engage with the *theoretical frameworks* that underpin their field. Hypotheses can be built upon the experience of critical reading of the texts chosen or upon the existing theories, or upon proposing new perspectives. They provide a structure for critical examination and for refining theoretical ideas.
3. Research questions influence the choice of *research methods*. The nature of the questions often determines a particular method that is derived methodology of reading texts. The formulation of hypotheses guides the researcher in designing textual analyses.
4. Addressing well-crafted research questions contributes to advancement of the field by adding insights or perspectives that were *previously unexplored*. Positive or negative results

have the potential to challenge or support existing theories and contribute to the scholarly conversation.

5. Research questions encourage *critical thinking* by prompting scholars to interrogate assumptions that underlie the texts, and consider alternative viewpoints. They often require a nuanced understanding of the subject matter. Hypotheses demand a level of skepticism and a willingness to challenge one's own assumptions. The process of testing hypotheses fosters critical engagement with texts and the development of analytical skills.
6. Research questions can be formulated to address real-world issues, connecting literary studies to broader societal concerns such as women's liberation, Dalits' empowerment, social justice, preservation of minorities' rights, eschew of ethnic violence, and abolition of racial prejudices. Thus, testing research hypotheses related to real-world issues allows for the application of literary analysis to contemporary problems, demonstrating the relevance of literary studies beyond the academic culture of appreciation of all literary texts.

#### **4.8 Recommendations**

Improving research skills, including the formulation of research questions and hypotheses is crucial for English literature researchers. Continuous refinement and a willingness to adapt one's approach will certainly contribute to the success of their scholarly endeavours. Here are some recommendations:

1. Researchers should thoroughly read the chosen texts and review existing literature in their field in order to identify gaps, debates, and areas where further investigation is needed.
2. They should clearly define the objectives of their research. In other words, they should be clear about what they aim to achieve with their study. This clarity naturally guides the formulation of precise and focused research questions.
3. They should formulate research questions that are specific and answerable. Each question should address a particular aspect of their research.
4. They should ground their research questions in relevant theoretical frameworks. Understanding existing theories in their field will help them develop questions that contribute meaningfully to the scholarly conversation and discussion.
5. They should recognize that research questions may evolve as their understanding of the topic deepens. They should therefore be open to revising and refining their questions based on ongoing literature review and research findings.

6. Their research questions should align with their chosen methodology which includes close reading as well.
7. They should differentiate between descriptive questions that aim to describe a phenomenon and analytical questions that seek to understand the underlying reasons or implications. A mix of both can enhance the depth of their study.
8. When framing hypotheses, they should articulate clear and examinable propositions derived from their research questions. Hypotheses can guide them to structure their analysis.
9. They should share their research questions and hypotheses with peers, mentors, or advisor so that their constructive feedback can help researchers refine their ideas and ensure that their research is on the right track.
10. They should keep abreast of new methodologies (of reading) and approaches (literary theories). Innovations in research methods may inspire them to frame questions that leverage the latest tools or perspectives.
11. They should cultivate critical thinking skills by questioning assumptions, considering alternative viewpoints, and evaluating the implications of their research questions and hypotheses. This will contribute to the robustness of their study.
12. Finally, they should participate in workshops, or training sessions, or RCs on research skills. These opportunities can provide practical insights, tips, and resources for enhancing their ability to formulate effective research questions and hypotheses in addition to other aspects of literary research.

## 5. Conclusions

The incorporation of well-defined research questions and hypotheses in literature research emerges as an indispensable aspect of scholarly inquiry. These elements provide a roadmap, guiding the researcher through the exploration of existing knowledge and the formulation of new insights. Research questions serve as beacons, directing the focus of the study and ensuring clarity of purpose, while hypotheses bring structure by proposing provable assertions. Together, they not only enhance the rigor of the research process but also contribute to the generation of meaningful conclusions. As researchers navigate the ever-expanding realms of knowledge, the inclusion of robust research questions and hypotheses remains an essential compass, steering academic investigations towards deeper understanding and the advancement of our collective intellectual pursuits. **Eighty-four percent of participants support the integration of research questions and hypotheses in literary research. Nonetheless, a significant number of research scholars indicated that their supervisors fail to assist them in developing research questions and**

crafting hypotheses. Consequently, they expressed a lack of awareness concerning these crucial elements. This deficiency primarily stems from a lack of methodological orientation attributed to strict adherence to the *MLA Handbook*. Every research question has been adequately answered, and both hypotheses have been substantiated in the study. In literary research, the integration of research questions and hypotheses is not merely a choice; rather, it is a necessity.

## 6. Ethical Approval

The subject is relatively novel for research scholars who not only possess a Ph.D. in literature but are also actively engaged as professionals in academic institutions. Their research orientation is primarily shaped by a steadfast commitment to the *MLA Handbook*, emphasizing documentation procedures and skills over research proficiency. Consequently, the researcher gathered minimal academic profile information such as the participants' names, the colleges where they are employed, and their years of experience. Assurance was provided that these details would be treated confidentially. Further, only individuals holding a Ph.D. in literature were invited to participate and record their responses.

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