Doing Classroom-based Research

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Before we begin our workshop, I would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – (the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation). It is upon their ancestral lands that the University of Sydney is built. As we share our own knowledge, teaching, learning, and research practices, may we also pay respect to the knowledge embedded forever within the Aboriginal Custodianship of Country.

Guest Wifi Account

Username: tesolworkshops
Password: 389320

Introduce yourself to the people around you

- Hi, my name is …
- I am from …
- Nice to meet you. Let’s study together.

Activity 1: Answer the following questions

1. What is research?
2. Why do we need research?

Activity 1

What is research?

Research is the process of seeking answers to questions systematically and carefully. It involves planning, organizing, collecting, and analyzing data to generate evidence-based conclusions. In applied linguistics, research typically focuses on understanding language learning, teaching, and use through thorough investigation and ethical considerations. It requires sound interpretation and conclusions that are firmly rooted in evidence while acknowledging any limitations in the study.

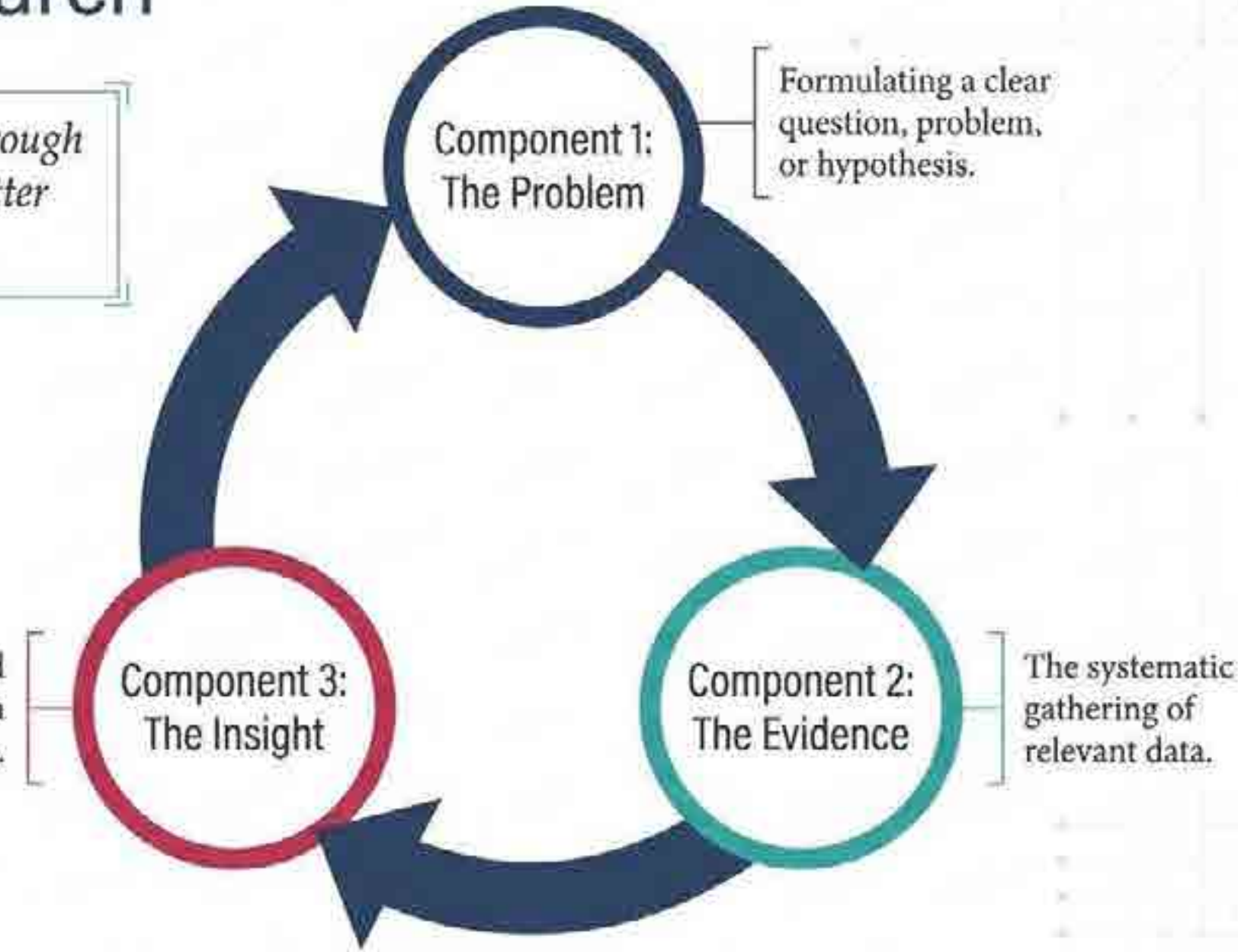
Activity 1

Why do we need research?

It helps us understand the world, solve problems, and generate new understanding or knowledge. For example, in classroom language research, teachers can address vital questions such as how students learn another language, how teaching methods can be improved, or how assessment tools can better measure language achievement.

Defining "Research"

A planned, systematic, and thorough investigation of a problem to better understand what is happening.



Core Aims of TESOL & Applied Linguistics

Pillar 1: Theory & Knowledge

Constructing Theory

Gain basic knowledge about language learning and use across specific contexts.

Validating Ideas

Confirm existing theories about language learning through the gathering of empirical evidence.

Pillar 2: Real-World Contexts

Understanding Environments

Analyze the roles of individuals and contexts affecting language learning.

Evaluating Systems

Assess language teaching, testing, translation, and program evaluations.

Pillar 3: Social Equity & Application

Solving Global Problems

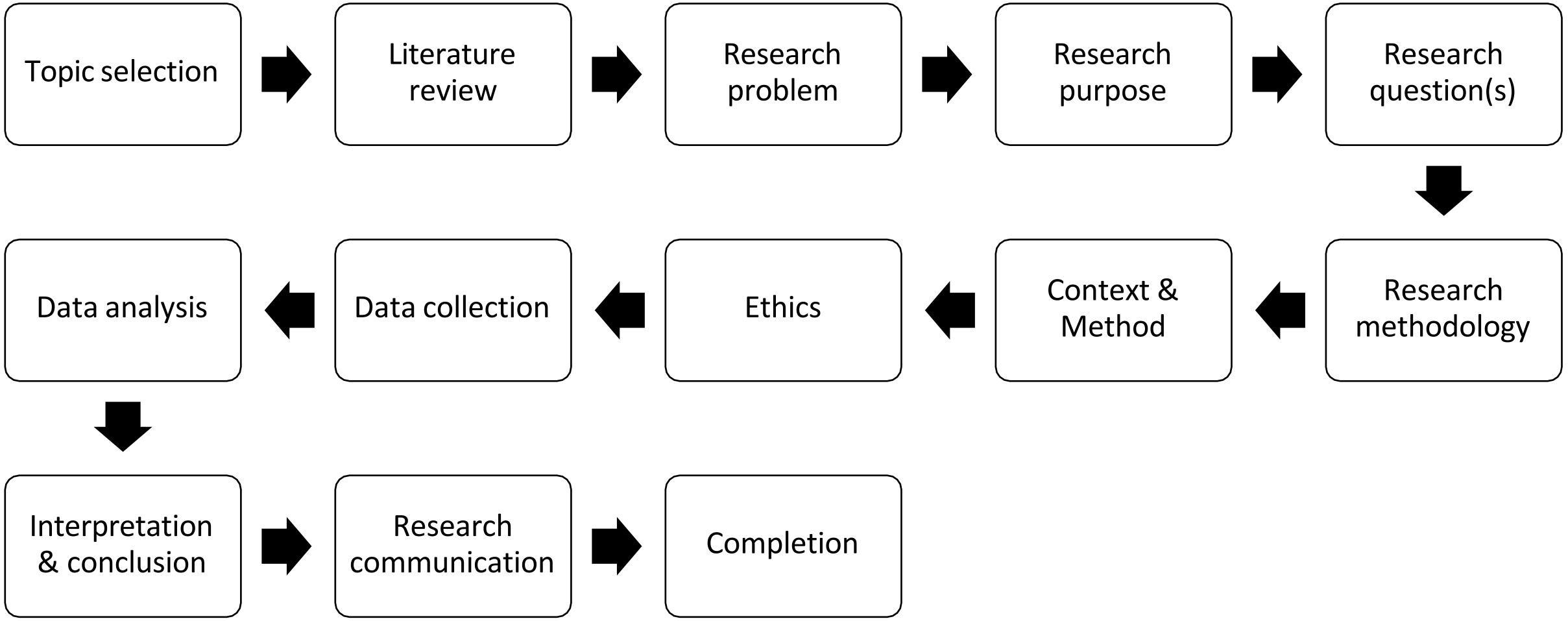
Address worldwide communication challenges and educational policy failures.

Reducing Inequality

Minimize issues of unfairness tied to language barriers and related societal issues.

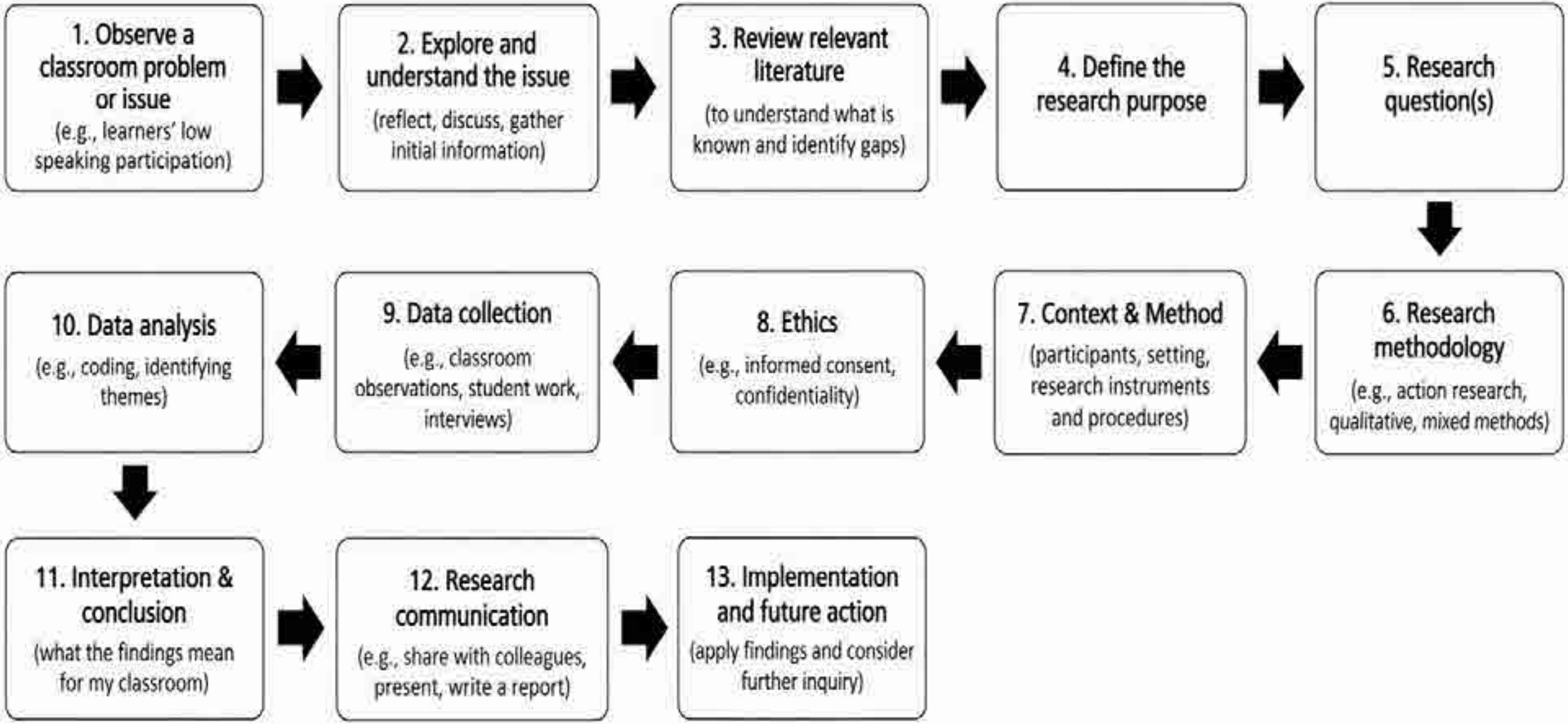
What is classroom-based research?

Common empirical research processes

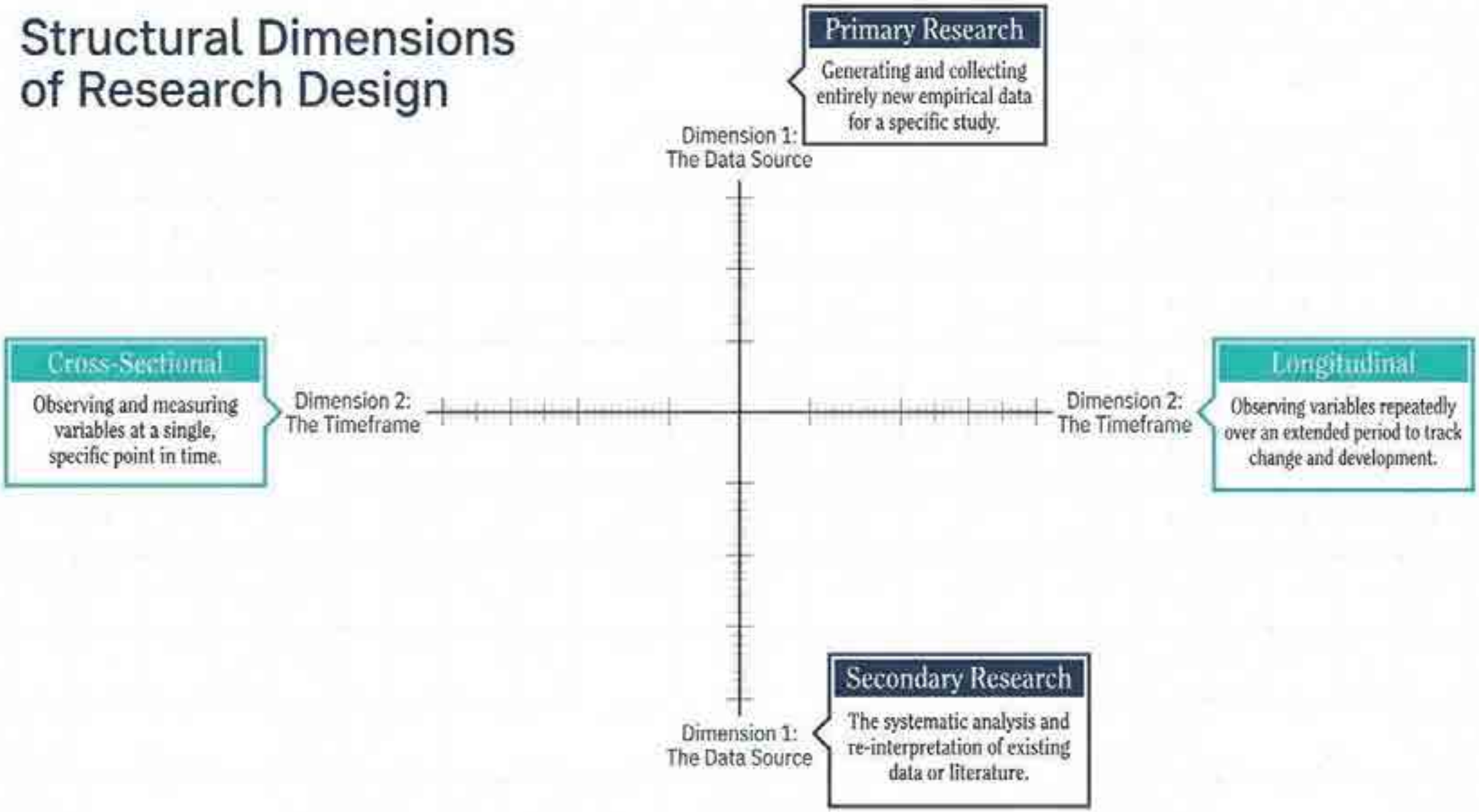


Classroom-based Language Research Process

(Starting from a teacher's observed problem)



Structural Dimensions of Research Design



The Research Expedition Map

Navigating the lifecycle of a master's dissertation.

Phase 1: Planning (The Compass)

- Topic selection
- **Literature review**
- Research problem
- Research purpose
- Research question(s)

Phase 2: Execution (The Dig)

- Research methodology (Context & Method, Ethics)
- Data collection
- Data analysis

Phase 3: Discovery (The Unearthing)

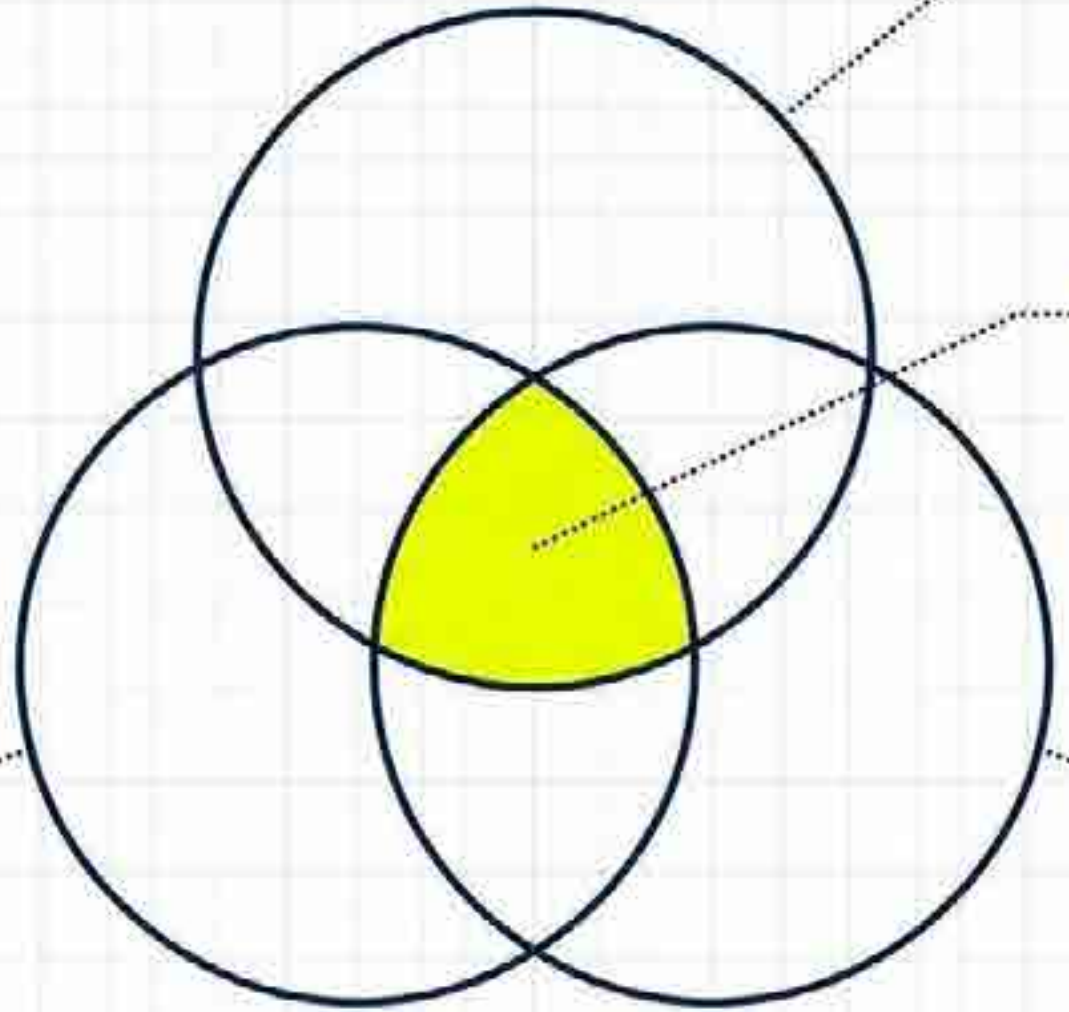
- Interpretation & conclusion
- Research communication
- Completion

Useful questions to start classroom-based research

1. **What?** What is the purpose of this research? What are you trying to find out?
2. **How?** How will this research answer these questions?
3. **Why?** Why is this research worth doing? Or why is it worth knowing?

Finding Your Spark (Brainstorming)

Personal Interest
Aligns with your academic or professional goals.
(List 3-5 potential topics).



The Ideal Topic

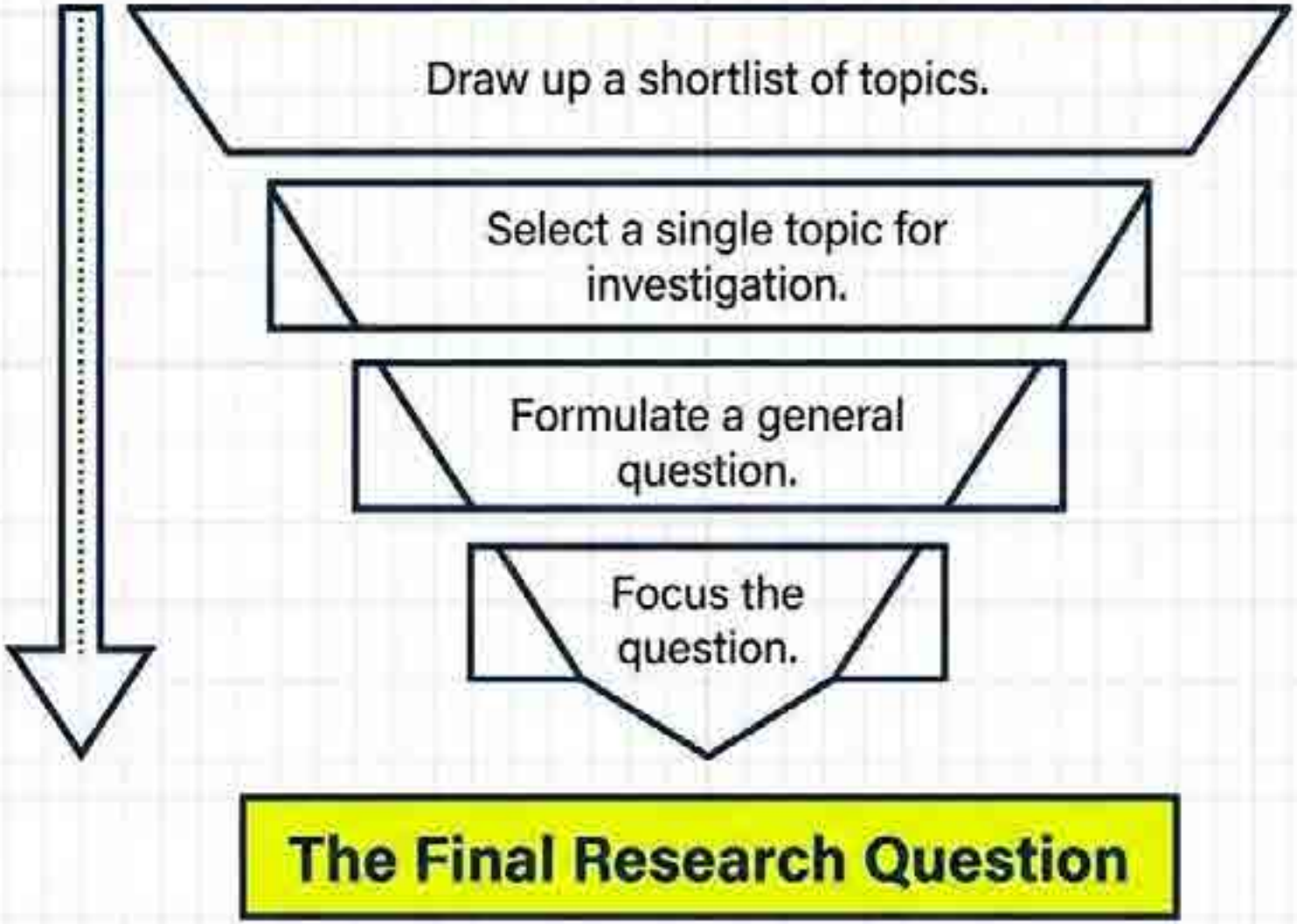
The Gap
Addresses a specific problem or missing piece of knowledge.

Relevance
Important to the field of language studies or to society at large.

Activity 2

- What are potential topics of interest for your classroom-based research?
- Write down three to five topics you are personally interested in exploring within the field of language studies.
- Use the following reflective questions to narrow your ideas:
  1. What specific problem or gap in knowledge does this topic address?
  2. Why is this topic important to language teaching?
  3. Is this topic feasible within the constraints of time, resources, and skills?

The Funnel of Refinement



Example of research question development

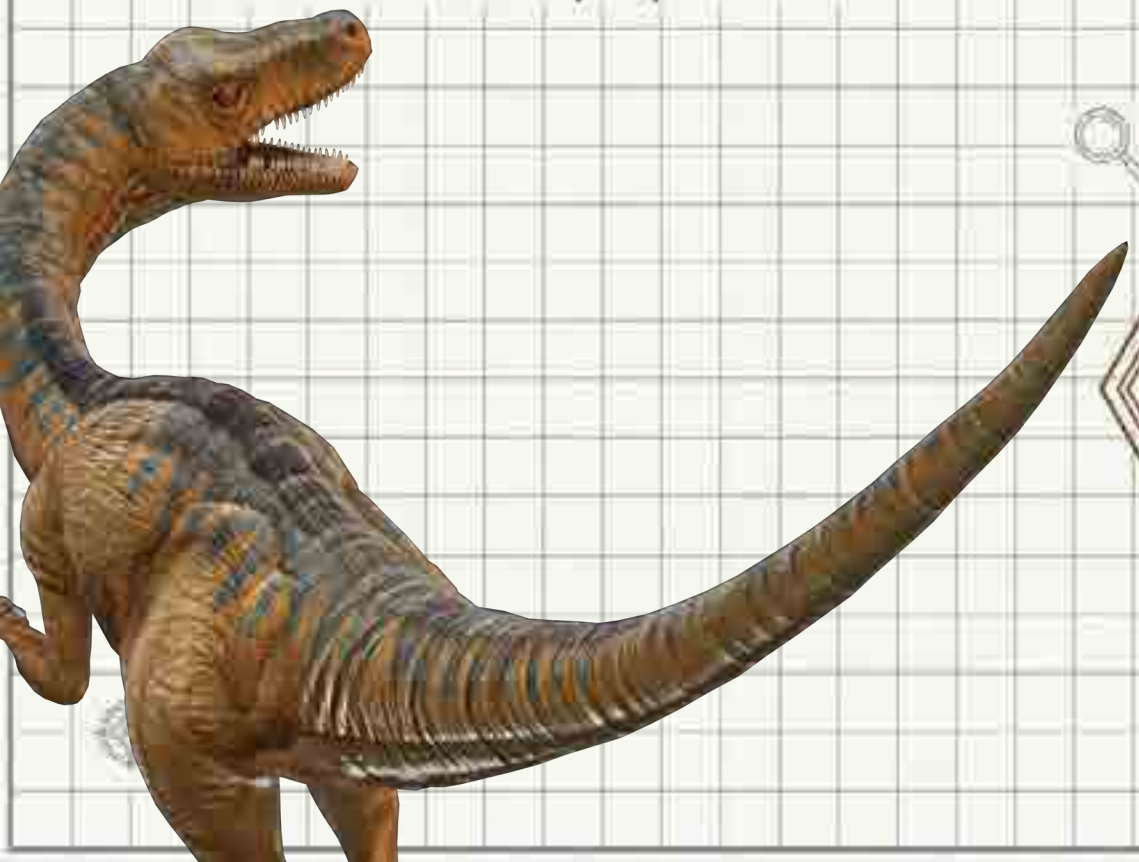
- **Choosing a topic**
  - Gender differences in strategy use
- **Choosing a question**
  - Do male and female students differ in strategy use?
- **Focusing the question**
  - Do male and female students differ in metacognitive strategy use in ESL reading?
- **Narrowing the focus of the question**
  - Do male and female students differ in metacognitive strategy use in ESL reading in Foundation English 201?

Strategies to refine research questions

- Read up-to-date materials
- Ensure that your idea is achievable
- Discuss your ideas with colleagues and other researchers
- Ask yourself: What will we know at the end that we did not already know?

The Anatomy of a Perfect TESOL Research Question

Six essential dimensions of a master's-level inquiry.



The Research Question

Specificity & Focus: Avoid vagueness. Narrow but deep.

Example: "What strategies do Chinese university students use to improve their English writing skills in an EFL context?"

Gap-Driven: Rooted in limitations identified in prior studies (often found in journal discussion sections).

Methodological Alignment: Pairs logically with methods.

Qualitative: "How do EFL teachers perceive technology..."
Quantitative: "What is the relationship between vocabulary size..."

Clear & Measurable: Specifies data collection. Uses directive verbs (explore, examine, analyze).

Relevance & Importance: Addresses timely issues (e.g., blended learning impacts on speaking proficiency).

Interest & Feasibility: Fits within your resources, timeframe, and participant access.

Activity 3: What may be proble this topic?

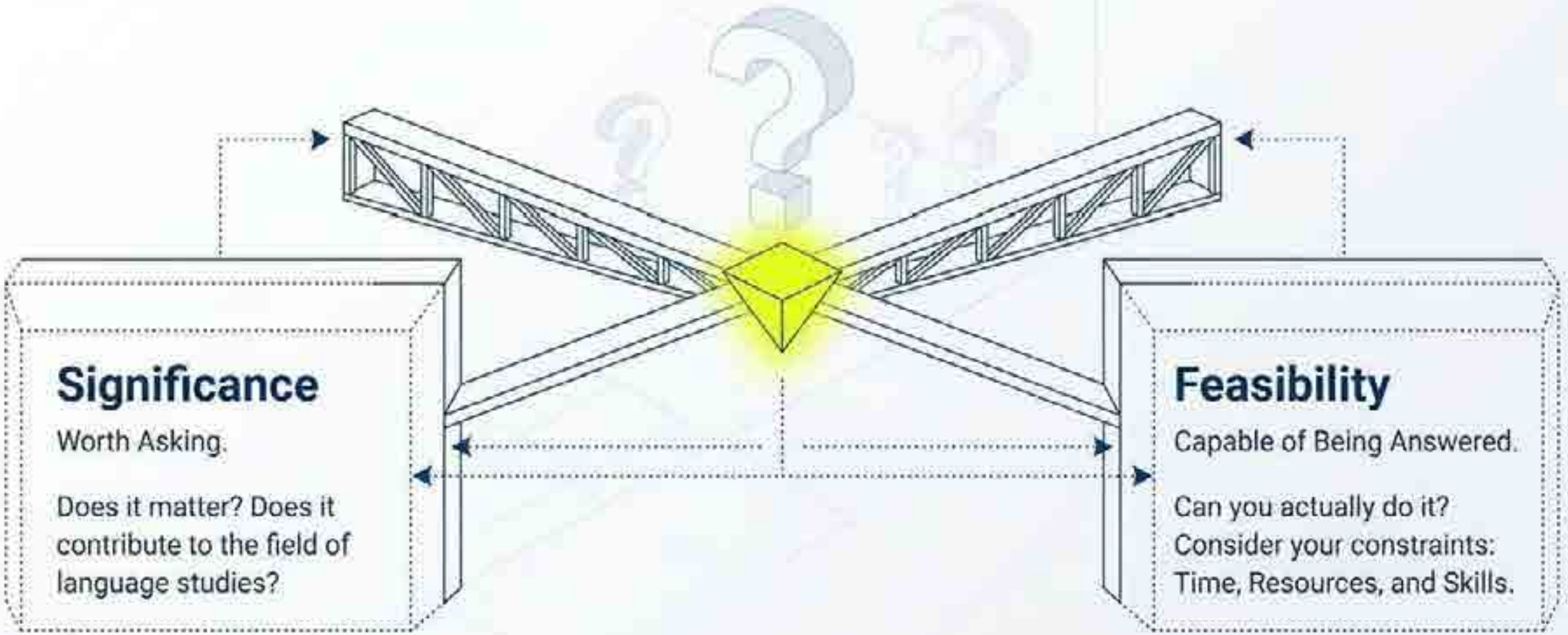
"Differences between secondary students and iversity students on motivation of learning English as a foreign language in China"

Proposal Makeover: Refining Your Scope

Draft ⚠		Refined ✓
Title: "A study of motivation in learning English." (Vague).	.....	**Title:** "A Comparative Study of Motivation in Learning English: Secondary vs. University Students in China." (Concise & Academic).
Scope: Comparing all secondary to all university students. (Too broad; unmanageable data).	.....	**Scope:** Narrowing demographic constraints to fit within available resources and time limits.
Theory: Assuming motivational differences exist without a framework.	.....	**Theory:** Applying a defined theoretical lens (e.g., Self-Regulated Learning theory) to explain why attitudes toward knowledge differ.

The ‘Goldilocks’ Check

A focused question must balance two realities:



Significance

Worth Asking.

Does it matter? Does it contribute to the field of language studies?

Feasibility

Capable of Being Answered.

Can you actually do it? Consider your constraints: Time, Resources, and Skills.

The Reality Check

Anticipate challenges before they derail your project.

10-min Break