

PERSILA Workshop

Writing Research Proposal

Date: 14 March 2015

Time: 9.00 am – 12.00 pm

Venue: Idris Babjee Conference Room, SES

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What is the research proposal?

- You need to write a research proposal whether your research is quantitative or qualitative or both.
- In any academic field, your research proposal will go through a number of committee for approval before you start your research.



What is the research proposal?

- Most beginning researchers do not fully understand what a research proposal means, nor do they understand its importance.

‘Submitted as a requirement for the degree of Master or PhD’



What is the research proposal?

- A research proposal is intended to **convince** the committee that you have a **meaningful research project** (*title and the research problem is/are researchable, current/ new issue*) and that you have the **capability** and the **work-plan** (*methodology*) to complete it.



What is the research proposal?

- A high quality proposal, not only **promises success** for the project, but also impresses the committee about your **potential as a researcher**.
- Generally, a research proposal should cover all the **key elements** involved in the research process and include **sufficient information** for the committee to evaluate it.

What is the research proposal?

- A **written plan** for a study.
- A research proposal must tell the committee the following **key** information:
 1. The **purpose** of the study
 2. The **importance** of the study
 3. A **step-by-step** plan for conducting the study
- **Proposal defense** permit the committee to evaluate the proposed research and offer some **suggestions** for improving the study.



The major section of a research proposal

- Writing a research proposal is an ongoing discussion.
- Certain requirements for a research proposal may vary from school to school, faculty to faculty, universities to universities.
- An academic research proposal is usually made up of **three main components**:
 1. Introduction
 2. Literature Review
 3. Methodology



Find a good topic

- It should be relevant to your context or concerns.
- It should be related to your interest **AND** there should be enough material to interact with. Too many students start a topic with great interest that is stymied because of lack of resources.



Find a good topic

- Your supervisor frequently gives you only a very general topic .
- **Example:** School Based Assessment Policy
- You must narrow this topic to something manageable within the scope of a study.
- The following approaches may be helpful in choosing and narrowing your topic (<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/859.asp>):



Find a good topic

- **Use journalistic questions.**

Examples: *What* are the important issues in school based assessment policy? *Who* plays significant roles in policy making? *Where* are the most innovative policies being developed?

- **Do exploratory reading.** Review general sources.

Examples: Encyclopedias, reference books, text books, etc.

- **Review recent journals in your area.**
- **Talk with supervisor, lecturers, coursemates**

Find a good topic

http://www.sharjah.ac.ae/English/Academics/Colleges/Graduate/DepartmentsPrograms/DepartmentofResearch/Documents/CGSR_TWIG07/3_CGSR_TWIG07_CHAPTER3_ENG.pdf

1. Make your title as understandable as possible.
2. Use specific, familiar and short words.
3. Use correct syntax (word order) to avoid misunderstanding.
4. Avoid the use of unnecessary words that do not add anything to the title.
5. Do not include abbreviations, or chemical formulas in your title.
6. Let your title be concise and descriptive.
7. Think of an informative but catchy title.



Background to the study

- Present **background information** about the **problem area**, in the form of a **discussion**.
- Set the stage for the entire study and puts your **topic in perspective**.
- Include **general statements** about the need for the study. It uses dramatic **illustrations or quotes** to set the tone.
- Appropriate **references to prior research** in the field, **conveying** to the the readers/committee the researcher's knowledge of the field.



Background to the study

- Start with a broad or general perspective of the main subject area, then gradually narrowing the focus to the central problem under **investigation and discussion** (Ranjit Kumar, 2011).
 1. An overview of the main area under study.
 2. A historical perspective or philosophical issues relating to the topic.
 3. General theories relating to the topic.
 4. The main issues, problems and the main findings relating to the topic.



Background to the study

- Example (Ranjit Kumar, 2011):
- Suppose that you are conducting a study to investigate the impact of immigration on the family. The introduction should include a brief description of the following:
 1. The origins of migratory movements in the world.
 2. The reasons for migration.
 3. General theories developed to explain migratory behaviour.
 4. Current trends in migration (national)
 5. The impact of immigration on family roles and relationship (e.g. on husband and wife, on children and parent etc)



Examples

1. The cognitive diagnostic assessment for the learning of statistics.
2. Effectiveness democratic leadership and group supervision in enhancing teacher professionalism in Malaysia.



Statement of the problem

- The description of an **issue currently existing** which needs to be addressed.
- It provides the context for the research study and generates the questions which the research aims to answer.



Statement of the problem

- A clear statement of the specific problem to be investigated.
- This should in a way indicate **why** the particular problem is important. It should outline the basic rationale on which the study derives. **This section should be specific and backed by evidence.**



Statement of the problem

- **Knowledge gained from other studies and the literature about the issues you highlight to investigate should be an important part of this section (Ranjit Kumar, 2011)**
- **The statement of the problem is the focal point of your research. Each point may just two of three **sentences** but with several paragraphs of **elaboration**.**



Objectives of the study

- A **brief outline** of what the researcher wants to find out.
- It has the **general and specific objectives** of the study.
- The general objective is stated in a general statement giving the major purpose of the study.
- Specific objectives derive from the general, are more specific and numbered.
- The objectives should be clearly stated and specific in nature. **Each specific objective should explain only ONE issue.**



Research questions

- These are specific questions derived from the research objectives, which can also be numbered.
- Develop the good research question, ONE THAT IS NEITHER TOO BROAD NOR TOO NARROW.

Exercise: Is the research question too broad, too narrow, or o.k.?

- Select what you think is **the best research question** (neither too broad nor too narrow).
(<http://www.esc.edu/htmlpages/writerold/menus.htm#exer1>)
- If you choose juvenile delinquency (a topic that can be researched), you might ask the following questions:
 - **Question A:** What is the 2000 rate of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia ?
 - **Question B:** What can we do to reduce juvenile delinquency in Malaysia?
 - **Question C:** Does education play a role in reducing juvenile delinquents?



Explanation

- Question "a" is too narrow, since it can be answered with a simple statistic.
- Question "b" is too broad; it implies that the researcher will cover many tactics for reducing juvenile delinquency that could be used throughout the country.
- The best research question is "c." Question "c," is focused enough to research in some depth.



Exercise: Is the research question too broad, too narrow, or o.k.?

- QUESTION A: Do children sent to daycare or pre-school start kindergarten with more developed skills?
- QUESTION B: Do children sent to daycare or pre-school start kindergarten with more highly-developed language skills?
- QUESTION C: Do children sent to daycare or pre-school start kindergarten with larger vocabularies?



Explanation

- Question "a" is **too broad** since it focuses on ALL skills (e.g., language, social, small motor skills, large motor skills, etc.--you get the idea).
- The **best** research question is "b," "Do children sent to daycare or pre-school start kindergarten with more highly-developed language skills?"
- The topic is broad enough to find more than just one or two sources, but it's limited to one focus--the development of pre-school language skills.



Explanation

- There may or may not be enough information to answer question "c." You'd need to find more than just one or two studies if you chose to answer question "c." If you find that there are enough sources dealing with vocabulary only, then you could choose to pursue question "c."

Exercise: Is the research question too broad, too narrow, or o.k.?

- Question A:
- What are the 14 different disease-causing genes that were discovered in 1994?
- Question B: What is the importance of genetic research in our lives?
- Question C: How might the discovery of a genetic basis for obesity change the way in which we treat obese persons, both medically and socially?



Explanation

- Question "a" is far too narrow to develop into a research paper. You could answer this question in one sentence, and the question does not allow you to develop your own thoughts about the topic.
- Question "b" is too broad. You could write a book to discuss the importance of genetic research in our lives.



Explanation

- Question "c" is the best choice.
- You can logically posit what "might happen" in the future based on what "has happened" in the past.
- Your research may bring you to the major things thought to have caused obesity in the recent past (last 2-3 decades) in order to establish a direct relationship between cause and treatment.



Significance of the study

- Shows the **contributions** the study will make to the area of study.
- Indicate how your research will refine, revise, or extend existing knowledge in the area under your investigation.



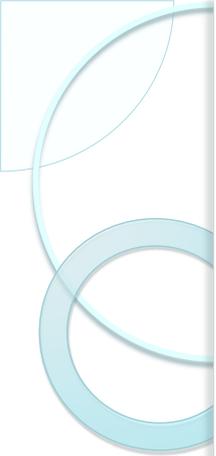
Significance of the study

- Think about implications, how results of the study may affect scholarly research, theory, practice, educational interventions, curricula, counseling, policy.
- Answers the questions why is your study important (i.e. to whom is it important, and what benefit(s) will occur if your study is done).
- These can also be numbered.



Limitations of the study

- Set the limitations or boundaries of research in order to provide a clear focus.
- A limitation identifies potential weaknesses of the study. Think about your analysis, your instruments, and the sample.
- Think about threats to validity that may have been impossible to avoid or minimize and explain them.



Definition of terms

- Gives the **definition of important terms** and concepts that are usually stated in the research objectives, hypothesis, and research questions.
- This section should also include the **“Operational definitions”**. These are definitions that you have formulated for the study. It is stated in ways that make the variable or term measurable. In other words it is operationally defined.



LITERATURE REVIEW

- This can be a summary of **various research findings and methods** used.
- The review of the literature provides the background and context for the **research problem**. It should establish the need for the research and indicate that the researcher is knowledgeable about the area.
- **Research problems, objectives and questions** should derive from the literature review.



LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Sections** can include:
- The definitions
- Concepts and theories
- The related studies
- Theoretical /conceptual framework.



LITERATURE REVIEW

(<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/859.asp>)

- Most students' literature reviews suffer from the following problems:
- Lacking organization and structure
- Failing to cite influential papers
- Failing to keep up with recent developments
- Citing irrelevant or unimportant references
- Depending too much on secondary sources

Secondary sources involve generalization, analysis, synthesis, interpretation, or evaluation of the original information.



LITERATURE REVIEW

- There are different ways to organize your literature review.
- Make use of subheadings to bring order and coherence to your review.
- It is also helpful to keep in mind that you are telling a story to an audience. Try to tell it in a stimulating and engaging manner.
- Do not bore them, because it may lead to rejection of your worthy proposal. (Remember: Professors and scientists are human beings too.)



METHODOLOGY

- It is very important because it tells your Research Committee how you plan to tackle your research problem.
- It will provide your work plan and describe the activities necessary for the completion of your project.



METHODOLOGY

- Shows **how** the researcher will carry out the research.
- You need to demonstrate your knowledge of alternative research methods and make the case that your research method is the **most appropriate and most valid way** to address your research question.
- Please note that your research question may be best answered by qualitative research. However, you may need to justify your qualitative method.



METHODOLOGY

- Sections are made up of the following:
 1. Research design
 2. The study population
 3. Sampling procedures
 4. Instrumentation
 5. Pretest/pilot study
 6. Data collection
 7. Data analysis



Research design

- Describe the study design you plan to use to answer your research questions.
- Describe two or three possible alternatives and then tell why you propose the particular design you chose.
- For instance, describe the differences between experimental, quasi-experimental, and non-experimental designs before you elaborate on why you propose a non-experimental design.



Research design

- Include details about the various logistical procedures you intend to follow while writing this section.
- One characteristic of a good study design is that it explains the details with such clarity that, if someone else wants to follow the proposed procedures, he/she will be able to do exactly as you would have done.



Sampling procedures

- Describe the sampling methods and the suitability in the study.
- Describe how you determined how many people to include in the study and what attributes or characteristics they have which make them uniquely suitable for the study.



Instrumentation

<http://des.emory.edu/mfp/proposal.html>

- Outline all the instruments you propose to use.
- If instruments have previously been used, identify previous studies and findings related to reliability and validity.
- If you develop your own instrument, outline procedures you will follow to develop and test the reliability and validity. In the latter case, a pilot study is nearly essential.
- Include an appendix with a copy of the instruments to be used or the interview protocol to be followed.



Data collection and analysis procedures

- Outline in a step by step the procedure to carry out your research and the general plan for collecting the data. This may include quasi-experimental administration procedures, survey administration procedures, interview or observation procedures.
- Describe how you propose to collect your research data e.g. through a short message service (SMS) if you are performing a quantitative analysis or through structured interviews if you are performing a qualitative or mixed methods study.



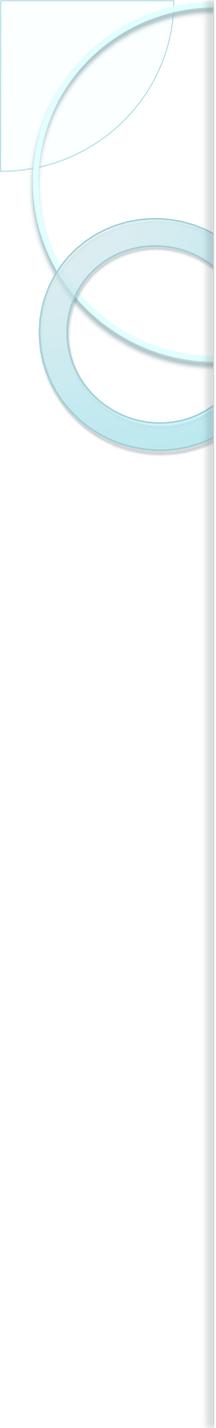
Data collection and analysis procedures

- After the data had been collected, you also need to follow a procedure as how to analyze the data and report the results. Indicate briefly any analytic tools you will expect to use (e.g., Ethnograph, SPSS, SEM, WINSTEP).
- Specify the statistical procedures you will use, and label them accurately (e.g., ANOVA, MANCOVA, ethnography, case study, grounded theory).



Data collection and analysis procedures

- If you are proposing a qualitative study you might use a certain computer program to perform a narrative study that exposes the main themes from the proposed interviews.
- If coding procedures are to be used, describe them in reasonable detail. This labeling is helpful in communicating your precise intentions to the reader, and it helps you and the reader to evaluate these intentions.



Thank You



References

- Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2010). How to design and evaluate research in education (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Ranjit Kumar. (2011). *Research Methodology: A step-by step guide for beginners* (3rded). London: SAGE publication Ltd.