

Chapter 6

Research Proposal

Components of a Research Proposal

Preliminary Section

Proposal Title and Title Page

- The title identifies the proposed research project and must concisely and clearly indicate: The length of the title matters a lot.
- The title should include key terms that readily the scope and nature of the study.
- It should tell what the proposal is about.
- It should be informative, specific and concise and is relevant to the intended contents of the proposal.
- The title is usually written in capital letters without the use of abbreviations.
- Title is a label; it is not a sentence.

- The title page usually includes:
 - ✓ the name of the topic;
 - ✓ the name of the author;
 - ✓ the name of the advisor;
 - ✓ the relationship of the report to a course or degree requirement;
 - ✓ the name of the institution where the report is submitted (course team/school/university);
 - ✓ and the date and place of the delivery or presentation.
- The title page has no page number and it is not counted in any page numbering.

Acknowledgement (if any)

- An acknowledgement page is included if the writer has received unusual assistance in the conduct of the study.

Abstract

- The abstract is a one page brief summary of the research proposal.
- It needs to show a reasonably informed reader why a particular topic is important to address and how you will do it.
- To that end, it needs to show how your work fits into what is already known about the topic and what new contribution your work will make.
- Specify the question that your research will answer,
- establish why it is a significant question, and show how you are going to answer the question.

- Do not put information in the abstract that is not in the main text of your research proposal.
- Do not put references, figures, or tables in the abstract.
- In short, abstract is a concise summary of the material presented in the proposal. Though it appears at the front of the proposal, it is written last.
- A well-prepared summary enables the reader to
 - Identify the basic content of a document quickly and accurately.
 - Determine its relevance to their interests, and
 - Decide whether they need to read the document in it's entirely.

Table of Contents

- A good table of contents serves as an important purpose in providing an outline of the content of the report.
- The relationship between principal and minor divisions is indicated by capitalization of chapter numbers and titles, with subheadings in small letters and with capitalized principal letters

The Main Body of the Proposal

Part one

Introduction

- **Background of the Study**
- This is the part that gives the reader the context of your study.
- In developing this part, you should briefly discuss the historical developments of events regarding the specific topic you are interested to study;
- describe your basic assumptions/concerns that led you to study the topic;
- and justify why you think there is still a need to further study topic.

- Here, limit the references to the key ones and use them selectively in order to discuss the deficiencies of current studies.
- This discussion should lead to the formulation of the problem that your study is going to address.
- The background section should contain a rational for your research.
- Why are you undertaking the project?
- Why is the research needed?
- This rational should be placed within the context of existing research or within your own experience and/or observation.
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- You need to demonstrate that you know what you are talking about and that you have knowledge of the literature surrounding this topic.
- If you are unable to find any other research that deals specifically with your proposed project, you need to say so, illustrating how your proposed research will fill this gap.
- If there is other work that has covered this area, you need to show how your work will build on and add to the existing knowledge.
- Basically, you have to convince people that you know what you are talking about and that the research is important.

The Problem Statement

- It begins with the general background of the problem and ends with a concise statement of the problem.
- In building up the problem statement, a researcher must show why he has selected the variables in the problem statement. The selection of the variables must be based on either empirical data or on information extracted from the literature.
- The specific problem statement can then be clearly stated in a final paragraph. Effective problem statements answer the question “Why does the research need to be conducted”.

- Leading questions that can help you to formulate a research problem:
 1. What do you want to know?
 2. Where do you want to do the research?
 3. How is the situation? What state of affairs or processes do you want to describe?
 4. When? What time span you will study?
 5. Why will you study this? To what purpose?
 6. What consequences will the new knowledge have?

- General Principles of Problem Formulation
 - ✓ Be sure that the problem exists.
 - ✓ Learn as much as possible about the problem to be solved.
 - ✓ Employ the most feasible or most efficient method of solution or both. This requires a judicious consideration of cost, time, manpower, etc.
 - ✓ Consider alternate or substitute formulations in case the original one is not feasible.
 - ✓ Formulate the problem systematically.
 - ✓ Do not try to solve complex problems by simple formulations.
 - ✓ Be aware of the possibility that the problem in formulation may influence the phenomena being studied.

Evaluation of a Research Problem

- Is the problem in line with my goal expectations and the expectation of others?
- Will the solution of this problem advance knowledge appreciably?
- Will the findings be of practical value?
- What will be the breadth of application in terms of years of applicability and range of people that can benefit from the study?
- Will it duplicate the work that has been done or is being done adequately by someone else?

- Do I pose of can I acquire the necessary skills, abilities and background knowledge to study this problem?
- Do I have access to the tools, equipment, laboratory, subjects, etc necessary to conduct the investigation?
- Do I have the time and money to complete it?
- Can I obtain adequate data?
- Does the problem meet the scope, significance and topical requirement of the institution to which I will submit the report?

Objective of the study

- The objectives of the research delineate the ends or aim which the inquirer seeks to bring about as a result of completing the research undertaken.
- The objectives of a research project summarize what is to be achieved by the study.
- Objectives should be closely related to the statement of the problem

- Objectives should be simple (not complex), specific (not vague),
- stated in advance (not after the research is done),
- stated using “action verbs” that are specific enough to be measured.
- Commonly research objectives are classified into general objectives and specific objectives.
- The general and specific objectives are logically connected to each other and
- the specific objectives are commonly considered as smaller portions of the general objectives.

General objective:

- What exactly will be studied?
- General statements specifying the desired outcomes of the proposed project.

Specific objectives:

- Specific statements summarizing the proposed activities and including description of the outcomes and their assessment in measurable terms.
- It identifies in greater detail the specific aims of the research project, often breaking down what is to be accomplished into smaller logical components

- **Research Question/hypothesis**
- Hypothesis/ questions are a proposition (a working assumption) about the relationship between two or more variables.
- It is a statement of specific expectations or intelligent guesses about the population involved.
- Hypotheses/questions are derived from the observations and relationships accepted as facts in the statement of the problem.

- **Significance of the Study**
- In this part, you should state the importance of undertaking your research for different stakeholders in different aspects such as for governmental agencies, developmental agents, private business sectors, policy makers, researchers, practitioners, etc.
- **Scope of the study**
- It is the delimitation of your study in terms of issues to be investigated, areas to be covered and duration of time needed to accomplish.

- **Key words of the study (optional)**
- This part includes the definition or description of the key words or jargons in your study so as to avoid difficulty of understanding the ideas and concepts associated to those words or phrases to your readers.
- **Organization of the study**
- This part deals with the structure of the proposal. It describes all of the contents of the proposal or logical sequences of the different parts of your proposal.

Section Two

Literature Review

- In a typical research proposal, this is where you will start to discuss your literature review in greater depth.
- The point here is to identify the literature that will establish the significance of your research.
- In other words, the discussion of the literature in this section should be sufficient for you to show how your project will extend current knowledge.

- Literature review is **not** a compilation of every work written about a topic.
- It is **not** simply a list of sources reviewed separately for their own merit.
- A literature review is a description of the literature relevant to a particular field or topic.
- It gives an overview of what has been said, who the key writers are, what are the prevailing theories and hypothesis,
- **what questions are being asked, and what methods and methodologies are appropriate and useful.**

- Present and briefly discuss the major theories that relate to your research problem,
- and then go into greater depth regarding the one or two theories you feel will be core in your research and will help you move your study to its next level.
- Make sure that you do not simply list the literature, but also organize it in some coherent manner and **'engage in a dialogue'** with it by exposing the variables that will be significant in your study,
- showing in every instance how these will influence your research, **comparing and contrasting different views on the topic, explaining your rationale for accepting or rejecting them, etc.**

- The beginning of literature review is first to systematically breakdown the title of the study into key words, phrases, main headings and subheadings.
- There are many potential sources of information about what literature you need to read and where to find it:
 - ❖ Your supervisor; experts;
 - ❖ The subject librarian in your university library;
 - ❖ Bibliographies in the literature you read;
 - ❖ Online searches on the worldwide web;
 - ❖ Newsgroups on the internet; and
 - ❖ Your fellow students.

- In literature review, it is a common practice to begin with most general works and then proceed to more specific sources on the subject particularly journals, working backward in time until adequate coverage is obtained.
- Read the abstract and conclusions first and decide if you want the rest. You will take it only if it is closely related to your study.
- Show respect for the literature. A scientist is not only creator of new knowledge, but also protector and transmitter of old knowledge.

- **Conceptual framework**
- A conceptual framework covers the main features (aspects, dimensions, factors, variables) of your research and their presumed relationships (Robson, 1993).
- The conceptual framework should be the culmination of your literature review, at a more basic level in the proposal and a more advanced level in your final thesis.
- Developing a conceptual framework forces you to be explicit about what you think you are doing.

- As Robson (1993) states, it helps you to be selective, to decide which are the important features, and to determine which relationships are likely to be of importance or meaning – and hence what data you are going to collect and analyze.
- It is important to close this section by relating the literature review and the conceptual framework to your proposed study, making it clear to the reader how what is already known is connected with what your study aspires to reveal, or what the ‘gap’ is that your research is aiming to close

Section Three

Methodology

- In this section, you are expected to describe your study area and justify your research methodology in detail.

Descriptions of the Study Area

- It includes information about the **location, resources, infrastructures and facilities, and socio-economic activities** of the study area

Overall research design

- explaining that you will describe the **approaches, strategies and data collection techniques** to be used in carrying it out.
- you may explain your research approach and why this is the appropriate approach for this study

Subjects/Targets of the Study

- These are **individuals, organizations/institutions** who are believed to be sources of information for our data which are going to be collected and used as an input for our study or research.
- More clearly, **these are bodies whom you planned to distribute questionnaires to, who you are planned to interview** and discuss with and observe during your research undertakings.

Data type, collection technique(s) and instrument(s)

- Another key point in your proposal is **justification of the techniques you will use for data collection**, as well as a description of your research instruments' development.
- Here you need to explain **why you have chosen the specific technique(s)** and
- **why these are appropriate to answer the particular research question or questions within your study.**
- Obviously, to support your argument you will need to present, in some detail, **the advantages of this technique for your particular research.**

- However, you will need to show that you are also aware of the **disadvantages** inherent in this technique, that you have taken them into account, and that you considered **special measures** in order to eliminate them or **minimize their negative effects** on your study.
- ‘Research instruments’ means the tools that you will use in each of your data collection techniques – so if, for example, you are planning to use **participant or non-participant** observation, your instrument will be the **observation form, some guidelines and a schedule**.

Determination of sample and sampling technique

- Choose the type of sampling you use and your reason of choosing the method
- Determine the sample size

Data analysis techniques

- Your study will eventually result in the collection of a quantity of raw data. These data will need to be analyzed, and therefore when closing of Section Three of your proposal you will need to explain how this analysis will be handled.
- For example, interviews need to be transcribed, questionnaire answers need to be formatted in a way that can be counted or input to the analysis software, answers need to be recorded, etc
- Finally, inform the readers about how you will conduct the analysis, and whether you are going to use specific software.

Research ethical issues

- An issue that has been recently raised in many higher education institutions is that of ethics regarding research undertaken by staff and research students that involves human participants.
- Most universities have adopted a Code of Practice covering the ethical standards for research involving human participants, and have established research ethics committees to promote good practice and conduct formal ethics reviews of research. These standards mainly concern medical research.

- Sometimes questionnaires, observation and interviews can be potentially intrusive and might provoke anxiety in participants. It is highly unlikely that your research processes will affect or violate human rights, because any kind of harm or reveal the confidential nature of the participants' involvement.
- However, you need to take your supervisor's advice and follow the processes set by your institution with regard to ethical approval for your research.

Example of Code of Practice for ethical standards in research

- No research should cause harm, and preferably it should benefit participants
- Potential participants normally have the right to receive clearly communicated information from the researcher in advance
- Participants should be free from coercion of any kind and should not be pressured to participate in a study

- Participants in a research study have the right to give their informed consent before participating
- Where third parties are affected by the research, informal consent should be obtained
- The consent of vulnerable participants' or their representatives' assent should be actively sought by researchers
- Honesty should be central to the relationship between researcher, participant and institutional representatives
- Participants' confidentiality and anonymity should be maintained

- If your research involves face-to-face interviews, focus groups, direct observation or similar methods of data collection, participants should be given an information sheet (or leaflet) and asked to sign a consent form.

Information sheet for participants

- *Study title:*
- *Invitation paragraph:*
- *Why have I been invited to participate*
- *Do I have to take part?*
- *What will happen to me if I take part*
- Describe any disadvantages or 'costs' involved in taking part in the study, including the time involved.
- *What are the possible benefits of taking part?*
- *What will happen to the results of the research study?*
- *Who is organizing and funding the research*
- *Who has reviewed the study?*
- *Contact for further information:*
- *'Thank you':*
- *Date*

Working plan

- A tentative time plan will include all the activities you need to undertake, from the moment your proposal is approved till the completion of your research and the submission of your dissertation.
- It is a written evidence of the feasibility of your entire research, and you should therefore give it serious thought and be as realistic as possible with regard to the time allocated for each activity.
- The purpose of such a plan is to be a guide for both yourself and your supervisor with regard to your progress.

Budget plan

- Closing your proposal: the appendix
- In this section you will detail any material that will be used to support your proposal.

References/Bibliography