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RESEARCH PROPOSAL- A PROCEDURAL ANALYSIS

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Proposal writing stifles the creative process necessary to conduct good research The research proposal is a detailed description of how the study will be conducted that includes the study title and researcher names, statement of the research problem and research purpose, review of relevant literature, and the research question(s) or hypothesis(es). The proposal also includes a formal description of the procedure to be used in the study that includes the information or variables to be gathered, the participants of the study and potential benefits or risks, the design and procedure for gathering data, what data gathering method(s) will be used, and how the data will be analyzed.

The research proposal can be envisaged as the process to plan and to give structure to the prospective research with the final aim of increasing the validity of the research. It is therefore a written submission to spell out in a logic format the nature of the design and the means and strategies that are going to be used. Before an attempt is made to start with a research project, a research proposal should be compiled. For the beginner researcher, this is usually the most difficult part. It is, however, the most important aspect of the research project and should be considered carefully by the researcher. This does not only require subject knowledge, but also insight into the problem that is going to be investigated, so as to give logic and structure to research envisaged.

The synopsis should contain a brief account of the existing knowledge in the topic of research and the gaps in this knowledge which motivated the study. Only the key references needed to establish this must be cited. The objectives set out for the research should be listed and the methodology followed towards achieving these objectives must be described. Finally, the synopsis should clearly bring out the contributions of the research carried out and the salient conclusions arrived at.

THE SYNOPSIS / RESEARCH PROPOSAL MUST BE DIVIDED INTO SUBSECTIONS WITH TITLES

A- Introduction and Theoretical Rationale

The introduction is the part of the research proposal that provides the background information for the research proposal. Its purpose is to establish a framework for the research. In an introduction, the Investigator, create interest in the topic, lay the broad foundation for the problem that leads to the study, and place the study within the larger context of the scholarly literature.

If a researcher is working within a particular theoretical framework/line of inquiry, the theory or line of inquiry should be introduced and discussed in the introduction. The theory/line of inquiry selected will include the statement of the problem, rationale for the study, hypotheses, selection of instruments, and choice of methods. Ultimately, findings will be discussed in terms of how they relate to the theory/line of inquiry that undergirds the study.

In quantitative studies, use theory deductively and places it toward the beginning of the plan for a study. The objective is to test or verify theory. Thus begins the study advancing a theory, collects data to test it, and reflects on whether the theory was confirmed or disconfirmed by the results in the study. The theory

becomes a framework for the entire study, an organizing model for the research questions or hypotheses for the data collection procedure.

In qualitative inquiry, the use of theory and of a line of inquiry depends on the nature of the investigation. In studies aiming at "grounded theory," for example, theory and theoretical tenets emerge from findings. Much qualitative inquiry, however, also aims to test or verify theory, hence in these cases the theoretical framework, as in quantitative efforts, should be identified and discussed early on.

B- Statement of the Problem

The research forms a circle. It starts with a problem and ends with a solution to the problem. Problem statement is therefore the axis around which the whole research revolves around, as it explains in short the aim of the research. Prospective researchers can search within their own subject field for suitable problems. What should, however, be mentioned, is that not all identified problems within a scientific field of study is suitable for research.

The problem statement describes the context for the study and it also identifies the general analysis approach. It refers to some difficulty that the researcher experiences in the context of either a theoretical or practical situation/ issue that exists in the literature, theory, or practice that leads to a need for the study" and to which he/she wants to obtain a solution. The formulation of a problem is far more essential than its solutions. To raise new questions, new possibilities, to comprehend old problems from a new angle require creative imagination and marks real advance in the related subject.

A good problem statement begins by introducing the broad area in which research is centered and then gradually leads to the more narrow questions. Effective problem statements answer the question "Why does this research need to be conducted." If a researcher is unable to answer this question clearly and succinctly, and without resorting to hyper speaking (i.e., focusing on problems of macro or global proportions that certainly will not be informed or alleviated by the study), then the statement of the problem will come off as ambiguous

A problem statement should be presented within a context, and that context should be provided and briefly explained, including a discussion of the conceptual or theoretical framework in which it is embedded. Clearly and succinctly identify and explain the problem within the framework of the theory or line of inquiry that undergirds the study. This is of major importance in nearly all proposals and requires careful attention. It is essential in all quantitative research and much in qualitative research.

State the problem in terms intelligible to someone who is generally sophisticated but who is relatively uninformed in the area of investigation. In an experimental study (and even in some ethnographic research) the questions are one of the most important parts of the proposal. They should be carefully worded and measurable. For testable hypotheses, write them as directional hypotheses rather than in the null form. The research questions, which are not predicting an effect or relationship, simply label them as such and state them.

Identify a research problem or area of interest from everyday life experiences, practical issues, past research, or theory. Pay attention to the feasibility of the research problem or topic and whether it can be researched systematically. Determine the resources needed to conduct the study, , its size and complexity, as well as the value of the results or solution for both theory and practice. The research problem should be stated in such a way that it would lead to analytical thinking on the part of the researcher with the aim of possibly concluding solutions to the stated problem.

The following aspects are important when formulating a research problem:

- The research problem should always be formulated grammatically correct and as completely as possible. You should bear in mind the wording (expressions) you use. Avoid meaningless words. There should be no doubt in the mind of the reader what your intentions are.
- Demarcating the research field into manageable parts by dividing the main problem into sub problems is of the utmost importance.

C-THE TITLE

The title is usually only formulated after the research problem and sub problems have been stated in a more or less final format. The research project title should demarcate the following:

- the WHO or/and WHAT is researched;
- the WHERE;
- the WHEN;
- the HOW; and
- an indication of the envisaged solution

D- Definitions of Terminology/Concepts and terms used

The success of any research depends on unambiguity and clarity on each inherent aspect. The terms used must be related with the study in question. To make the things clear, the investigator must define the terms in clear terms.

Indication of how the researcher interpreted and is going to use terminology/ concepts in the research report is very important, because some concepts/terms are often used in different meanings by different authors. So avoid broad topic areas which would be unmanageable as research topics, vague descriptions of research areas and subject areas where University has no expertise

E- Exploration of the Purpose of the Research

The researcher should indicate and defend why it is necessary to undertake the research. The benefits that will result from the research and to whom it will be beneficial should be indicated. Identifying a clear purpose and creating a purpose statement helps determine how the research should be conducted, what research design to use, and the research hypothesis (es) of your study.

Four general purposes for conducting educational research are to explore, describe, predict, or explain the relation between two or more educational variables.

- Explore – an attempt to generate ideas about educational phenomenon
- Describe – an attempt to describe the characteristics of educational phenomenon
- Predict – an attempt to forecast an educational phenomenon
- Explain – an attempt to show why and how an educational phenomenon operates

The identification of purpose of study will help in determining the research design should follow. Three research designs are mixed, qualitative, and quantitative paradigms. The research purpose will also help in developing the research question(s) or hypothesis (es) of the study. A research question is an extension of the purpose statement and specifically states the questions to be answered. Usually, research questions are used when the study's purpose is more exploratory or descriptive

"The purpose statement should provide a specific and accurate synopsis of the overall purpose of the study". If the purpose is not clear to the writer, it cannot be clear to the reader. So briefly define and delimit the specific area of the research. The purpose statement can also incorporate the rationale for the study. Some committees prefer that the purpose and rationale be provided in separate sections, however.

Precautions when preparing a purpose statement

- Try to incorporate a sentence that begins with "The purpose of this study is . . ." This will clarify the mind to the purpose and it will inform the reader directly and explicitly.
- Clearly identify and define the central concepts or ideas of the study. Some committee Chairs prefer a separate section to this end. When defining terms, make a judicious choice between using descriptive or operational definitions.
- Identify the specific method of inquiry to be used.
- Identify the unit of analysis in the study.

E- Review of the Literature

This section of the proposal need not be equivalent to the literature review chapter of thesis or dissertation. Again, two or three pages may suffice. The goal is not to give description of every study that has ever been conducted in the area, but to weave a careful overview of what has been done and how this study adds to existing knowledge.

To conduct research regarding a topic, by implication means that the researcher has obtained sound knowledge with regard to the research topic. It is therefore imperative that the researcher, at the time of the submission of the research proposal, clearly indicates what theoretical knowledge he possesses about the prospective research. A literature search therefore will entail the literature the prospective researcher has already consulted.

An overview of the literature anticipates the background knowledge of the researcher and a possible classification of the content for the purpose of stating the research problem. This should also reveal the importance of the contemplated research. A literature search therefore simplifies the formulation of hypotheses for the researcher.

Explore the research literature to gain an understanding of the current state of knowledge pertaining to your research problem. A review of prior research will inform about the research problem has already been explored (and if a revision or replication is needed), how to design the study, what data collection methods to use, and how to make sense of the findings of the study once data analysis is complete. Reviewing prior research can also help with creating research questions, what population to explore, and laying the theoretical groundwork for the study.

"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 investigator is knowledgeable about the area

The aims of a literature study are:

- To give all-round perspectives on the latest research findings regarding the topic.
- To indicate the best method, scale of measurements and statistics that can be used.
- To interpret the research findings in a better way; and
- To determine the relevancy of the prospective research.
- To shares with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being reported.
- To relate a study to the larger, ongoing dialogue in the literature about a topic, filling in gaps and extending prior studies.
- To provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study, as well as a benchmark for comparing the results of a study with other findings.
- To "frames" the problem earlier identified.
- To demonstrate that the investigator have a comprehensive grasp of the field and are aware of important recent substantive and methodological developments.

Delineate the "jumping-off place" for the study. How will the study refine, revise, or extend what is now known? Avoid statements that imply that little has been done in the area or that what has been done is too expensive to permit easy summary. Statements of this sort are usually taken as indications that the writer is not really familiar with the literature. In a proposal, the literature review is generally brief and to the point. Be judicious in the choice of exemplars—the literature selected should be pertinent and relevant. Select and reference only the more appropriate citations. Make key points clearly and succinctly.

The most effective and efficient way to review prior research is to search educational journals through electronic computer databases such as. Searching other library databases is also recommended.

It should further note that the research design must be accompanied by a preliminary list of references consulted by the researcher during the preparation of the research proposal. The list should include the most recent publications on the research topic. It must however be emphasized that this reference list by no means is sufficient to complete the research project – it must be augmented during further literature searches as the research process continues.

F-Formulating Hypotheses

A hypothesis states expectations concerning the relation between two or more variables in the research problem. Usually, a hypothesis represents an extension of a purpose statement or research question by adding a prediction or explanation component.

The practice of using hypotheses was derived from using the scientific method in social science inquiry. They have philosophical advantages in statistical testing, as researchers should be and tend to be conservative and cautious in their statements of conclusions.

A hypothesis is a tentative statement that implies a proposed answer to a problem, setting accountability and responsibility of effective research procedure as high priority Hypotheses are thus tentative statements that should either be acknowledged or rejected by means of research.

Hypotheses are relevant to theoretical research and are typically used only in quantitative inquiry. When a writer states hypotheses, the reader is entitled to have an exposition of the theory that lead to them (and of the assumptions underlying the theory). Just as conclusions must be grounded in the data, hypotheses must be grounded in the theoretical framework.

G-Propose Research Methods and Procedures

It is one task to generate a research question, it is quite another to determine an effective way to answer the question. First, we must decide to use a specific paradigm or mixture of paradigms. For example, will the project be a naturalistic or ethnographic study, a true experiment or quasi-experiment, an evaluation of a program, a survey, or a combination of methods? Each paradigm or research method has certain advantages and disadvantages and can be applied appropriately or inappropriately. The task of the proposal writer is to determine which method or combination of methods would be most effective to answer the research questions posed.

The methods or procedures section is really the heart of the research proposal. The activities should be described with as much detail as possible, and the continuity between them should be apparent

All research is plagued by the presence of confounding variables. Confounding variables should be minimized by various kinds of controls or be estimated and taken into account by randomization processes. In the design section, indicate, the variables to control and to control them, experimentally or statistically, and the variables to be randomize, and the nature of the randomizing unit. Be aware and anticipate possible sources of error and attempt to overcome them or take them into account in the analysis. Moreover, disclose the sources and identify the efforts to account for them.

- Decide on the method, techniques and tools to use
- Explain the rationale of each vis-à-vis the statement of the problems
- Describe the tool development process or use of existing one
- Describe how you will gather data for the study
- Indicate the population, sample size and the sampling procedure

Explain the statistical methods to be used with rationale

H – Sampling

The key reason for being concerned with sampling is that of validity—the extent to which the interpretations of the results of the study follow from the study itself and the extent to which results may be generalized to other situations with other people. Sampling is critical to external validity—the extent to which findings of a study can be generalized to people or situations other than those observed in the study. To generalize validly the findings from a sample to some defined population requires that the sample has been drawn from that population according to one of several probability sampling plans. By a probability sample is meant that the probability of inclusion in the sample of any element in the population must be given a priori. All probability samples involve the idea of random sampling at some stage. In experimentation, two distinct steps are involved.

Random selection- participants to be included in the sample have been chosen at random from the same population. Define the population and indicate the sampling plan in detail.

Random assignment- participants for the sample have been assigned at random to one of the experimental conditions. Another reason for being concerned with sampling is that of internal validity- the extent to which the outcomes of a study result from the variables that were manipulated, measured, or selected rather than from other variables not systematically treated. Without probability sampling, error estimates cannot be constructed.

Perhaps the key word in sampling is representative. One must ask oneself, "How representative is the sample of the survey population (the group from which the sample is selected) and how representative is the survey population of the target population (the larger group to which we wish to generalize)?"

When a sample is drawn out of convenience (a non-probability sample), rationale and limitations must be clearly provided. If available, outline the characteristics of the sample (by gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other relevant group membership).Detail procedures to follow to obtain informed consent and ensure anonymity and/or confidentiality.

I-Instrumentation

Outline the instruments propose to be used (surveys, scales, interview, standardized tests observation etc). If instruments have previously been used, identify previous studies and findings related to reliability and validity. If instruments have not previously been used, outline procedures to develop and test their reliability and validity. In the latter case, a pilot study is nearly essential. Because selection of instruments in most cases provides the operational definition of constructs, this is a crucial step in the proposal

- Include an appendix with a copy of the instruments to be used or the interview protocol to be followed. Also include sample items in the description of the instrument.
- For a mailed survey, identify steps to be taken in administering and following up the survey to obtain a high response rate.

J- Data Collection

Data gathering focuses on information acquisition that will attempt to answer the research questions or support the hypotheses. Data gathering includes consideration about what variables to investigate, the unit of analysis or participants of the study (population and sample), human subject protections, procedures used for selecting participants, the methods and procedures used for data collection, and any reliability or validity of collection methods.

Outline the general plan for collecting the data. This may include survey administration procedures, interview or observation procedures. Include an explicit statement covering the field controls to be employed. Provide a general outline of the time schedule you expect to follow-

PROPOSED ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data or statistical analysis will depend on whether the collected quantitative data, qualitative data, or both. For quantitative data, there are a variety of statistical analysis tools can be used to identify statistical relationships between variables. For qualitative data, data analysis generally involves holistically identifying patterns, categories, and themes.

K- Delimitations of the study

In this section a precise indication is given of the scope of the research with indication of the assumptions made, limitations and delimitations of the research before the research is started

A limitation identifies potential weaknesses of the study. Think about the analysis, the nature of self-report, the instruments, and the sample. Think about threats to internal validity that may have been impossible to avoid or minimize-explain.

Delimitation addresses how a study will be narrowed in scope, that is, how it is bounded. This is the place to explain the things that are not doing and why you have-not being chosen - the literature will not be reviewed (and why not), the population are not studying (and why not), the methodological procedures not

used (and why not to use them). Limit delimitations to the things that a reader might reasonably expect to do but that, for clearly explained reasons, have decided not to do.

FINAL EDITING OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Although the research proposal is considered the preliminary planning of a research problem, it should comply with the following requirements:

- The programme and its milieu
- State the problem.
- State the sub problems.
- State the hypotheses.
- Demarcate the terrain.
- Define the terminology.
- Indicate the importance of the study.
- Review related literature

The calculation and interpretation of data:

- Relevant data.
- Research methodology.
- The proposed handling of each sub problem.

A well prepared research proposal is characterized by an orderly logical outline. It should be emphasized that various disciplines and different research types, requires different approaches and methods.

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