THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Types of research proposal

Research proposals can be generally classified into student, internal and external. Student research proposals range between term paper and senior essay that are least complex to MSc thesis and PhD dissertation that are most complex. The form and content of student research proposal differs according to complexity of the student research. For instance, term papers are meant for teaching students as to how to do research where as senior essay, thesis or dissertation are supposed to develop students' knowledge on a specialized field. Research proposals are internal if they target an entity or organization and are prepared by individual or a team of researchers who are part of the entity or organization. External research proposals are either solicited or unsolicited. Solicited research proposals are when the customer asks for a proposal.

Sections of a research proposal

Section of a research proposal varies from one type of research proposal to the other. In addition, for practical reasons many research funding agencies prefer their own research proposal format

The most common sections of a large scale research proposal are: the title, abstract, introduction, literature review, importance/benefits of the study, data and method, method of data analysis, qualification of the researcher, facilities and other resources, budget, time schedule, project management, bibliography, and appendix. For a small scale research proposal, the most common sections could be: the title, introduction, literature review, data and method, importance/benefits of the study, cost and time budget, and bibliography.

Title

Title or topic of a research proposal tells what the research proposal. It should be catchy, concise and descriptive. Title selection presumes extensive literature review related to the area of research interest. Therefore, whenever you design your topic it is better to think in terms of the most important explanan and explanandum and delimitation of the proposed research. For example, the research topic on "Determinants of Private Investment in Bonga city administration " is good because it is concise and at the same time contains the three basic elements of a topic: the thing that is going to be explained (or explanandum), the thing that explains the explanandum

(or explanan) and a geographical scope. The explanandum of the aforementioned topic is private investment because your research is expected to draw conclusions pertaining to private investment. The explanans are captured by the word determinants. The actual factors that determine private investment are not stated in the topic because it has to be very concise. Hence, the key word "determinants" is used. Finally, the phrase "Bonga city administration" puts a geographical delimitation of the proposed research.

Background

This is an important part of the proposal. It should tell the reader why you feel the research that you are planning is worth the effort. This may be expressed in the form of a problem that needs solving or something that you find exciting and has aroused your curiosity. The reader will be looking for evidence here that there is sufficient interest from you to sustain you over the long months (or years) ahead.

This is also the section where you will demonstrate your knowledge of the relevant literature. Moreover, it will clarify where your proposal fits into the debate in the literature. You will be expected to show a clear link between the previous work that has been done in your field of research interest and the content of your proposal. In short, the literature should be your point of departure. This is not the same as the critical literature review you will present in your final project report. It will just provide an overview of the key literature sources from which you intend to draw.

Theoretical framework is the summarized form of your theoretical literature review. It draws a boundary within which the research problem is stated. In general, it serves as a background or context for your research problem and in particular, it serves the following purposes;

1) It helps you to clearly see the most important concepts of your research.
 2) It can provide you with a general framework for data analysis, and
3) It is essential in preparing research proposals that have descriptive or explanatory purpose.
 In exploratory researches little is known about the research topic hence, you may not have theoretical framework.

Statement of the problem

Statement of the problem part of your research proposal reflects the gap and justifies that the issue is worth researching. The problem statement is usually general, encompassing all of the most important concepts in the topic. Hence, statement of the problem has to be more focused making use of conceptual framework an operationalization of the theoretical framework. Conceptual framework is the summarized form of your empirical literature review. It reflects your own position on the problem and it guides you how to analyze your research problem.

The difference between theoretical and conceptual frameworks lies on the degree of abstraction of the concepts among which interrelationships are to be created. The theoretical framework creates interrelationship among higher level concepts or constructs thereby forming a set of propositions and the conceptual framework creates interrelationship among lower level concepts or variables there by forming a set of hypotheses. The conceptual framework needs to be summarized using hypothesis or research question.

Benefits of the study

This section allows you to write about why the research has to be done. Especially for large scale commissioned research proposals the importance/benefits of the study section is considered as justification to get fund. Hence, this section helps you to understand the research outcomes your sponsor expects. Moreover, this section indicates how clearly you understood the research problem. If you fail to correctly understand the research problem then you may face difficulties in writing the importance/benefits of the study. The converse is also true. If you face difficulties in writing the importance/benefits of the study then you failed to correctly understand the research problem.

Literature Review

Literature review is a body of text that aims to review the critical points of current knowledge about your research topic. A well-structured literature review is characterized by a logical flow of ideas, current and relevant references with consistent and appropriate referencing style; proper use of terminology, and an unbiased and comprehensive view of the previous research regarding your research topic.

Theoretical and empirical literature reviews

Literature review can be broadly classified into theoretical and empirical literature review. The theoretical literature review builds the detailed theoretical framework for your research that is an elaborated version of the one in the introduction part. This detailed theoretical framework can be structured as: 1) present critical review of alternative theories that can possibly help you as possible points of view to look at your research problem, 2) make appropriate citation, 3) consult experts and add your informed reflections on the theories, 4) illustrate your theoretical framework (i.e. interrelationships among constructs) using a diagram, and 5) state the most important propositions that characterize your research problem. On the other hand, you can build the detailed conceptual framework for your research proposal in the literature review part the same way as that of detailed theoretical framework.

The literature review serves several important functions some of which are: 1) Ensures that you are not "reinventing the wheel", 2) Gives credits to those who have laid the groundwork for your research, 3) Demonstrates your knowledge of the research problem, 4) Demonstrates your understanding of the theoretical and research issues related to your research question, 5) Shows your ability to critically evaluate relevant literature information, 6) Convinces your reader that your proposed research will make a significant and substantial contribution to the literature (i.e., resolving an important theoretical issue or filling a major gap in the literature), 7) Indicates your ability to integrate and synthesize the existing literature, and 8) Provides new theoretical insights or develops a new model as the conceptual framework for your research.

Referencing Styles

The term 'reference' refers to those consulted materials that are actually cited in-text, that is, when your research includes paraphrased empirical and theoretical quotations from published papers of other writers. On the other hand, bibliography refers to all materials consulted regardless of whether they are in-text referenced or not. There are two types of references: To write reference bibliography, there are a number of referencing styles such as Harvard Style, Chicago Style, American Psychological Association (APA) Style and etcetera. In this teaching material we use American Psychological Association (APA) style of referencing because of its

predominant use in social sciences. However, you need to remember the fact that sometimes the sponsor requires specific style of referencing.

In-Text Citation using APA style

In-text citation in the APA style requires the author and the year method. Page numbers are required for direct quotes. In-text citations rely on signal phrases that indicate the reader where you got your information using such verbs as: stated, noted, found etc. You can also have in-text citation without signal phrases using phrases such as: some authors explored, one study concluded, one writer asserted etc. If you are summarizing or paraphrasing others' work you need to put it within quotation. For example, you may cite as follows: According to Gebregziabher (2009b), self-initiated startup businesses follow the Pecking Order Hypothesis (p.333). Alternatively, the same quotation can be rewritten as; self-initiated startup businesses follow the Pecking Order Hypothesis (Gebregziabher, 2009b, p.333).

There are two types of quotations these are short and long quotation. A direct quotation of less than 40 words is called short quotation. For example, you may cite as follows: In his 2009 study, Gebregziabher noted, "MSE owners that started their business based on self-initiation exhibit a strong tendency to use internal sources before looking for external source of finance" (p.333). Long quotation is direct quotation of more than 40 words.

Long quotation can be cited as in the second paragraph of Example 4 but page number has to be included at the end of the indented paragraph.

In-text citation from a research paper of two authors should always include last names of both authors. For example, you may cite as: Gemechu and Amare (2008, p.15) emphasized …. If the in-text citation is from a research paper of three to five authors simply list name of the first author and add the phrase "et.al.". For example, you may cite as: Alemtsehay, et.al. (2004), concluded ….

If the author is unknown, use the title of the work in the signal phrase or give the first word or two of the title in the parenthetical citation. For example, you may cite as: one 2008 guide, "APA In-Text Citation Guidelines" stated that an in-text citation should include author and year of publication. Alternatively, this can be re-written without signal as follows: "In an APA style of

In-Text Citation author name and year of publication are written" ("APA In-Text Citation Guidelines", 2008).

If the author is an organization or government agency, use the name of the organization in your signal phrase or parenthetical citation. For example, you may cite as: according to Mekelle University (2009), "BPR implementation resulted in improved research performance". Alternatively, this can be re-written without signal as follows: One study has shown that BPR implementation resulted in improved research performance (Mekelle University, 2009). You can also use an abbreviation in your in-text citation as follows: In its study, MU (2009) concluded that BPR implementation resulted in improved research performance.

If your in-text citation involves citing memos, letters, emails, interviews etc you need to label the type of communication and the exact date on which it occurred but you need not write it in your reference list. For example, you may cite as follows: Meseret (Personal Interview, November 05, 2010) indicated that her study on class participation of students verified the importance of active participation.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is wrongful appropriation of others' idea, thoughts, expression, close imitation etc as if it were your own original work. However, this does not mean that you cannot use research papers of others' in your research proposal. You can use others' work but you must acknowledge the source using an appropriate reference. Plagiarism is not only copying and pasting of a text without reference but also presentation of others' idea as once own. If you use your own previous research work in your current research proposal without citation it is called self plagiarism.

Method

This and the background sections will be the longest sections of the proposal. It will detail precisely how you intend to go about achieving your research objectives. It will also justify your choice of method in the light of those objectives. These two aims may be met by dividing your method section into two parts: research design and data collection.

In the part on research design you will explain where you intend to carry out the research. The research design section gives an overall view of the method chosen and the reason for that choice. The data collection section goes into much more detail about how specifically the data are to be collected