

Research Proposal Writing: A Basic Understanding for Research

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Abstract: *Research proposals should effectively describe a precise and useful outline of the fundamental components of the proposed research. The primary focus of a research proposal must be on its dual objectives, specifically the internal objective of formulating a meticulously crafted research plan and the external objective of effectively demonstrating its significance and scientific validity to its readers. The abstract must explain eight essential concepts that require careful consideration during the meticulous preparation of a research proposal. These include the strong justification of the research effort, the defining of clear and concise objectives, the formulation of incisive research questions, the establishment of a conceptual framework, the articulation of well-grounded hypotheses, the identification of necessary data requirements, the selection of appropriate data collection instruments, and the cautious adoption of rigorous methodologies. The research proposal also discusses the necessary sections, such as the title, background and justification, objectives, research questions, hypotheses, data collection and methods, relevance and scope, and references. This article provides a comprehensive description of the complicated processes associated with designing a research proposal, highlighting its core significance, purpose, and fundamental components. The article concludes by exploring the noticeable indicators of an excellent research proposal and the typical length of a research proposal.*

Keywords: Research proposal, research methodology, proposal writing, research design, research objectives

1. Introduction

Research proposal writing is an important initial task to pursue in order to investigate the potential and order of the proposed research. It is important to have a general understanding of the “research” being undertaken before engaging with a research proposal. Research is “a methodical exploration of an issue or resolution, based on critical analysis of relevant evidence” (R. Walliman, 2005). “Scientific research may be defined as a systematic, controlled, empirical, and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among observed phenomena” (Kerlinger, 1986). This definition includes the fundamental concepts required to define the methodology of scientific research and explains a process that has been generally acknowledged for ages.

A brief research proposal highlights a topic. It is prepared before data collection. It addresses what, how, and why the research will be done. Research should not be considered a recreational activity. It should be constructive and have a purpose. The proposal should demonstrate to readers that the research would be worthwhile. The proposal should explain what the research’s expected results are to address this. This is distinct from attempting to predict the findings, which can only be known once the study has been completed. The outcomes, however, are the “deliverables” researchers anticipate from their research.

Academic research based on the types of data collected may be classified into two primary categories. The primary method is known as “desk research,” and it refers to any kind of study that is undertaken using just published and unpublished materials as its source of data; in other words, the research is primarily reliant on secondary data. Information taken from sources such as books, journal articles, published and unpublished dissertations and theses,

reports, databases, newspapers, and magazines will be used as references. The second category of research is called “empirical research,” and it involves the collection of data using methods such as individual perspective, observation, experimentation, interviews, and questionnaires. As a result, this type of research relies primarily on primary data (Abdulai& Owusu - Ansah, 2014).

2. Why is your research proposal important, and for what purpose?

Research proposals are crucial because they outline research and assure that all procedures are undertaken to accomplish it effectively and efficiently. Research proposals clarify study objectives and methodology and ensure that the proposed research is ethical and appropriate. Research proposals also make sure that the research is appropriate, based on facts, and of high quality. Sometimes, they can even help get funding, scholarships, and other resources.

A research proposal serves two distinct purposes: the “internal purpose” and the “external purpose.” The “internal purpose” of the research proposal constructively forces the researchers to carefully design and plan the research within relevant methodological, ontological, and epistemological frameworks, which might also be understood as constructing a good research design. The “external purpose” is to persuade scholars and readers that the researcher has an important, relevant, new, and innovating research idea and hypothesis, that it is of high scientific quality, properly formulated with sound methodology, and that the planned research could be implemented with realistic time and resource utilisation (Peters, 2003).

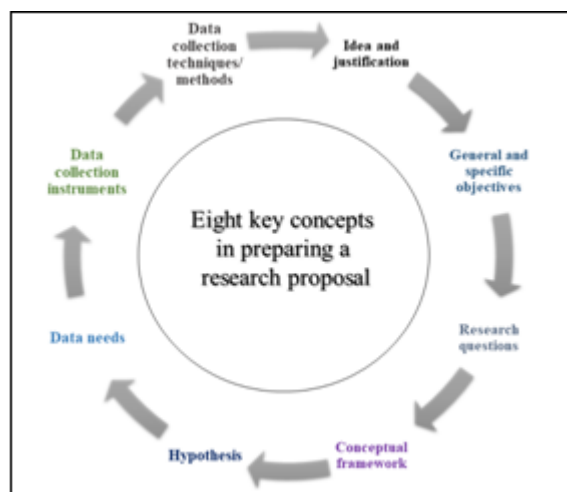


Figure 1: Key Concepts of a Research Proposal

There are usually eight key concepts that should be kept in mind while preparing a research proposal.

- The idea and justification of the planned research
- There should be different “general” and “specific” objectives to the planned research.
- The research proposal should consist of valid, relevant, objective, empirical, and answerable “research questions.”
- There should be an appropriate “conceptual framework.”
- There must be hypotheses. Sometimes hypothesis and research questions are not considered together, and only one is considered in the proposal.
- The type of data required, whether primary or secondary, should be specified.
- It is important to provide a description of the instruments used to collect data.
- And finally, there must be a very precise description of the techniques or methodologies that are going to be used in the data collection.

What should be included in a research proposal?

The process of writing a research proposal is complicated and demands meticulous attention to every detail. It is essential to incorporate relevant sources of information throughout the proposal to support and authenticate the idea presented. It should contain a short overview of the project, a list of objectives, a description of the methodology to be used, an estimate of the timeline, a budget, and a bibliography. In addition to providing background information and an explanation of the topic’s significance, the proposal should contain a list of sources that demonstrate its familiarity with the subject.

3.1. Title

There should be a good descriptive and attractive title in accordance with the proposed research. One can also combine words to create an appealing, related title and avoid boring traditional topics. There could be short, catchy titles, then a subtopic or subtitle that goes into more detail and gives more information (Angelsen et al., 2012). One should always choose keywords for the title that effectively and accurately describe the topic of proposed research, include

terminology and concepts associated with the research that are relevant, avoid using jargon and buzzwords as much as possible since they might cause confusion among the readers, and after that, proofread your title to verify that it is devoid of any typographical or grammatical mistakes.

3.2 Background and justification:

This section should include an overview of the research that has already been accomplished on the subject and explain what new knowledge will be obtained from the study that is being proposed. In addition, it should explain why the proposed study is necessary and important, and it should also provide a rationale for any hypotheses or questions that the research will examine. It should describe a brief review of the existing knowledge base and the major conclusions relevant to that particular subject. There should be a detailed conceptual and theoretical framework that describes the existing studies to date, and there may be one’s own framework.

3.3 General and specific objectives:

It should highlight the objective of the proposed research work along with the concerns that contributed to the demand for conducting the research. This should be straightforward and concise in nature. The specific objectives (the scope and number depend on the type of research proposal), which should explicitly formulate what the study will contribute to the area specified in the general objective, should answer the question, “How will this study contribute to the area specified in the general objective?” Researchers should avoid using ambiguous verbs like “understand” and “study” and instead choose for more particular verbs such as “determine,” “develop,” “calculate,” and “compare” in order to explain the planned actions in a concise and straightforward manner. The sequence in which certain objectives are accomplished should often go from the simple to the more meticulously analytic.

3.4 Research questions

While preparing a proposal for research, it is crucial to take into consideration prospective research questions. Research questions raised during research should be researchable. It should be relevant to the research being done, have a precise understanding, and not be arbitrary or ambiguous in either way, limiting the scope of the research and decreasing the number of units of analysis. Research questions should be specific and measurable so that the findings can be quickly and precisely analysed. They must also be associated with previous research or related to current relevant topics, identify gaps in previous knowledge, and seek to address those gaps through research. Subsequently, questions should be linked to the overall objectives of the research proposal. In the meantime, there should be new questions or old questions that have been reformulated and taken one step further. Moreover, research questions should contribute to the existing knowledge base.

3.5 Hypothesis

While drafting a proposal for research, it is essential to consider the possible hypotheses that might be tested. A hypothesis is a testable scientific statement that is formulated with the purpose of being tested through the collection and examination of empirical evidence and data. It should be formulated as a response to each research question, and all variables included in hypotheses must be measurable. One of the most important things about a hypothesis is that it can be tested. It should be based on previous findings, reflections, and observations.

3.6 Data collection and methods

The process of obtaining and measuring information on certain variables in a defined and systematic manner is referred to as "data collection." This establishes the basis for one to answer reasonable questions and derive outcomes once the procedure has been completed. Data can be analysed using quantitative and qualitative techniques. The research proposal should be able to provide comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter, regardless of whether it incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques.

The data collection and methodology section of the proposal should make it abundantly clear how and why the data should be collected. The description of the data required to answer the research questions (the main variables), how to get such data (sampling means determining which individual or group should be included and how many should be included), and how to assure the quality of the data must be provided. Also, it should include a discussion of the specific methodologies that are used to examine the particular variables. Avoid providing a constructed general description of the methodologies you used and instead focus on developing a particular methodology (such as historical, comparative, and case study approaches, etc.). Everyone is familiar with these approaches; thus, explain why this way is the most pertinent and advantageous for the researcher's objectives.

3.7 Relevance and scope of the study

Since it demonstrates why the research is significant and what contribution it will make to the discipline, the relevance and scope of the study in the research proposal are an essential component. The researcher must explain in a broad context how the findings of the proposed research would result in a significant improvement over the findings of the previous studies and how they would enhance the subject as a whole. The uniqueness of the research the researcher wants to conduct should be demonstrated in the proposal. As such, the researcher should explain why the findings of the research are significant. The research proposal should not only explain the relevance and scope of the study but also explain how the findings could be utilised. This information is crucial in developing the credibility of the research and highlighting that the researcher has the required ability to facilitate high quality findings.

3.8 References

In order to maintain the ethical standards of the research proposal, there must be a list of references to key works and texts that are discussed within the proposal, as well as a selection of sources that are relevant to the proposed research. It is essential to include citations and references for any content that is not exclusively the researcher's own conception. In addition to including a list of works cited at the end of your research proposal, your references should be included within the body of the document itself. To avoid being charged with plagiarism, it is crucial to correctly cite all of your sources. Use the right style, such as "MLA," "APA," or "Chicago," to appropriately cite a source. Examples of accurate citations can be obtained in the style guides that correspond to each of the abovementioned styles.

4. Indicators of the quality of a research proposal:

A research proposal of high quality should contain several essential components that provide evidence that the proposed study has been carefully considered that it is practicable, and that it is likely to be successful. There are four generic indicators that are generally recognised throughout the many disciplines that fall under the category of social sciences.

4.1 Construct validity

This is the degree to which the operational measures in a study reflect the theoretical constructs on which they are based, as well as the accuracy with which a test measures the concept that it was designed to evaluate.

4.2 Internal validity

This is the extent to which a researcher may be certain that a cause - and - effect relationship established in proposed research cannot be explained by other causes. Internal validity refers to the approximate truth. Stating differently, is it possible for researchers to make a reasonable causal relationship between one's behaviour and the response they get from their research?

4.3 External validity

This refers to the ability to generalise findings. It refers to the extent to which a researcher is capable of applying the findings of the research to a variety of other circumstances, populations, environments, and measurements. In other terms, is the researcher capable of extrapolating the findings of the proposed research to a more general domain?

4.4 Reliability

This relates to the characteristic of consistency in measurement. A measurement is regarded as trustworthy if it is possible to get the same result by using the same procedures while functioning under the same circumstances on a consistent basis.

5. How long should a research proposal be?

Research proposal length depends on the programme, discipline, and institution. Even so, most research proposals are 5–15 pages long, with a normal length of 10 pages and 2000–3500 words, including references. A research proposal should be brief and thorough enough to describe the proposed research work, including the study design, methodology, analysis, ethics, schedule, and budget. The proposal should not be lengthy or repetitive. The researcher should always consider the proposal's audience and examine the proposal's institution's or funding agency's criteria. They usually specify or suggest a proposal length.

6. Conclusion

It is essential to acknowledge the profound importance of a research proposal, as it fulfils a multitude of purposes within the complexities of the research work. It serves as a comprehensive roadmap, defining the objectives, methodology, and projected outcomes of the study. Through a well - defined and coherent proposal, it is ensured that the research work will be carried out in a methodological and swift manner. The rationale for completing this study is based on its ability to demonstrate its significance, pertinence, and prospective contributions to the existing field of knowledge. It is crucial to note that a meticulously constructed research proposal plays an essential role in securing necessary funding, prestigious scholarships, and helpful resources. It also assumes safeguarding and upholding ethical considerations. Writing a research proposal qualifies as the key initial step in detailed research work. By carefully following these stated suggestions, researchers may significantly improve the probability of their proposal being accepted and their research endeavour achieving great success.

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