Crafting a Full Proposal for Thesis: An Instructional Perspective

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Abstract
This conceptual article serves as a detailed guide for developing the three critical chapters of a thesis - Introduction, Review of Literature, and Research Methodology, emphasizing desk review as the main method of exploration. It aims to equip researchers with a structured approach to effectively communicate their insights and contributions. As the present researcher experienced numerous critical issues while guiding the early-stage, young researchers in academia rightly shaping their manuscripts, the idea of writing this article emerged strongly to address this universal reality. Based on personal experience and life-long learning in this discipline, the present scholar has devised instructional insights to craft an academic research proposal in three chapters. The first chapter should provide a thorough introduction to the research topic, presenting the background, clearly stating the research problem, and setting out specific objectives, research questions, and hypotheses. In the second chapter, an extensive literature review should be performed covering conceptual and theoretical perspectives, relevant policies, empirical studies, best practices, and case studies. This comprehensive review should lead to the development of a conceptual framework that underpins the research. By synthesizing existing knowledge, the literature review should establish a solid foundation for the study, ensuring it is both theoretically grounded and contextually relevant. The third chapter should outline the research methodology, detailing the philosophical underpinnings, research design, strategies, and methods for data collection and analysis. It should address issues of validity, reliability, and ethical considerations, ensuring the methodological rigor of the study. By following the principles outlined in this guide, researchers can enhance the academic rigor and practical impact of their work, ensuring it is methodologically sound and theoretically informed. At the same time, it is not a blue-print, it is just a tentative guide, needful changes may apply as per the requirements across the disciplines and departments of study.
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Overview

For you as a researcher, the preparation of a thesis is a meticulous and intellectually demanding endeavor, requiring a clear and structured approach to convey your insights and contributions effectively. This conceptual article aims to provide an in-depth guide for crafting three pivotal chapters of a thesis: Introduction, Review of Literature, and Research Methodology. These chapters form the backbone of a scholarly thesis, setting the stage for a robust exploration of the research problem, synthesizing existing knowledge, and delineating the methodological pathways to be employed. By adhering to the principles outlined in this guide, you can ensure your work is methodologically sound, theoretically grounded, and contextually relevant, thereby enhancing the academic rigor and practical impact of your study.

Introducing the Research Idea in Chapter I

Chapter I of an academic research proposal at any level serves as the gateway to your thesis, laying the foundation for the entire research project. This chapter introduces the research idea, providing a comprehensive background that situates the study within a broader context. It articulates the research problem, sets clear objectives, and formulates key research questions and hypotheses. By defining the scope and delimitations, clarifying key terms, and identifying the missing links and gaps in existing knowledge, this chapter sets the stage for a focused and impactful inquiry. The Theory of Change provides a conceptual framework that guides the research process, ensuring that every step is aligned with the intended outcomes. This structured approach not only clarifies your intentions but also communicates the significance and relevance of the study to the academic community and beyond.

Background of the Study

Understanding the context and rationale behind a research topic is crucial for framing the study and highlighting its significance. This section provides a comprehensive overview of the research topic, setting the stage for a detailed exploration (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Bryman, 2016). The background should articulate why the topic is relevant and how it contributes to existing knowledge. It should also present a brief outlook on the culture of inquiry in the broad context governing the issue of interest of research.

The Missing Link and Gaps Analysis

Identifying the missing link and analyzing gaps in existing research helps in positioning your study within the broader academic discourse (Yin, 2018; Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2016; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This analysis highlights the areas where your research will contribute new knowledge.

Precisely here, backed up by the preliminary reviews and observations, you need to identify the gaps or unexplored areas in existing literature or practice that your study aims to address. After delineating the missing link, you need to provide a detailed analysis of existing gaps and how your study will address them. This might involve reviewing the literature and identifying areas where further research or any other intervention is needed.

Let us share an illustrative example to make it simpler. More recently, in a study aimed at the examination of learning difficulties by reading the texts in the English language, the missing link was portrayed as follows:

Despite numerous studies highlighting the importance of English proficiency in global education and the workforce, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific learning deficiencies faced by students in non-English speaking geographies when it comes to reading English texts. Existing research often overlooks the nuanced challenges these students encounter, such as the impact of limited exposure to English, culturally inappropriate teaching materials, and the availability of trained educators. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to these learning deficiencies and identifying effective strategies to address them, thereby enhancing English reading skills and overall academic performance in non-English speaking regions (Rijal, 2020).

Research Problem
A well-defined research problem forms the core of any study. It specifies the issue or gap that the research intends to address (Yin, 2018; Babbie, 2013). The problem statement should clearly articulate the problem, its significance, and the reasons for selecting it.

As Robson (2011) instructs, the problem statement should clearly outline the research problem and its significance. For instance, if studying a policy issue, the problem might involve gaps in existing policies and their implications. After writing the statement of the problem, it is equally important to justify why the problem is worth investigating by linking it to broader societal or academic issues (Patton, 2015).

Our multi-decade experience in this profession allows us to advocate for mainly two central ways to craft a statement of problem. For example, for a study aimed to explore the level of learning deficiency via English text reading in non-English speaking geographies, any of the following two approaches would be considered acceptable (Rijal, 2020; pp. 8-9):

> *Affirmative Approach:* In non-English speaking geographies, students often exhibit significant learning deficiencies when it comes to reading English texts. These deficiencies can be attributed to a variety of factors, including limited exposure to the English language, inadequate teaching methodologies, and a lack of resources such as English books and qualified teachers. This research aims to systematically explore the extent and nature of these deficiencies. By identifying specific challenges and gaps in learning, the study seeks to provide insights that can inform the development of targeted interventions to enhance English reading skills among students in these regions.

> *Interrogative Approach:* What are the primary factors contributing to learning deficiencies in English text reading among students in non-English speaking geographies? How do limited exposure to the English language, insufficient teaching methodologies, and lack of resources impact students' ability to read and comprehend English texts? This research seeks to answer these questions by investigating the specific challenges and barriers faced by students in these regions. By understanding the underlying causes of these deficiencies, the study aims to propose effective strategies to improve English reading skills and academic outcomes for non-English speaking students.

Research Objectives

Defining clear research objectives is essential for guiding the study. In Creswell and Poth (2017), the scholars intend to claim that the objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). They provide a roadmap for what the study aims to achieve.

The general objective describes the overarching goal of the research. For example, the goal might be to assess the impact of a specific policy on community welfare (Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Specific objectives break down the general objective into manageable parts. They should address particular aspects of the research problem.
For example, Rijal (2020), as cited in earlier instances, crafted the objectives of the study as follows (pp. 10-11):

The primary objective of the study was to systematically investigate and understand the factors contributing to learning deficiencies in English text reading among students in non-English speaking geographies, and to develop effective strategies to improve their English reading skills and overall academic performance.

More specifically, it aimed to --
a. evaluate the current level of English reading proficiency among students in selected non-English speaking geographies,
b. identify the primary factors contributing to learning deficiencies in English text reading, including limited exposure to English, teaching methodologies, and resource availability,
c. assess the effectiveness of current teaching methodologies and the availability and quality of resources such as textbooks and qualified teachers in teaching English reading skills,
d. analyze how socio-cultural factors and the students' native language influence their ability to learn and read English texts,
e. develop and propose targeted interventions and strategies that can be implemented to enhance English reading skills among students in non-English speaking regions,
f. design and conduct pilot programs to test the effectiveness of the proposed interventions in improving English reading proficiency, and
g. provide evidence-based policy recommendations for educational authorities and stakeholders to support the implementation of effective English reading programs in non-English speaking geographies.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Formulating research questions and hypotheses helps in focusing the study and testing theoretical propositions (Silverman, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Research questions guide the inquiry, while hypotheses provide testable predictions.
Research questions should be precise and aligned with the research objectives. For example, Yin (2018) suggests, that if studying educational interventions, a research question might be, "What, if there is any effect of a new teaching method on student performance?" Hypotheses should be formulated based on theoretical frameworks and prior research. They predict the relationships between variables, claims Bryman (2016).

We can again consider the research questions (RQ) set in Rijal (2020) as an illustrative example (Rijal, 2020; pp. 11-12):

RQ 1: What is the current level of English text reading proficiency among students in non-English speaking geographies? [This question aims to establish a baseline understanding of how well students can read and comprehend English texts in the targeted regions.]

RQ 2: What are the primary factors contributing to learning deficiencies in English text reading among these students? [This question seeks to identify and analyze the key factors, such as limited exposure to English, ineffective teaching methods, and inadequate resources, that impact students' reading abilities.]

RQ 3: How do current teaching methodologies and available resources affect the English reading proficiency of students in non-English speaking geographies? [This question examines the role of educational approaches and resource availability in the development of English reading skills.]

RQ 4: In what ways do socio-cultural contexts and native languages influence students' ability to learn and read English texts? [This question explores the impact of cultural and linguistic backgrounds on the students' English reading learning process.]

RQ 5: What targeted interventions and strategies can effectively improve English reading skills among students in non-English speaking regions, and how can their effectiveness be measured? [This question aims to identify potential solutions and assess their practicality and impact on improving English reading proficiency in the studied regions.]

Scope and Delimitations
Defining the scope and delimitations of the study helps in setting boundaries and focusing the research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Flick, 2018; Babbie, 2013). It is important to specify what the study will cover and what it will not. While writing about the scope of the study, you need to describe the extent of the research, including the topics, geographical area, and time frame (Babbie, 2013). Following by scope of inquiry, you need to discuss the limitations and constraints of the study, such as sample size or methodological limitations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

Definition of Key Terms
Defining key terms is crucial for clarity and consistency throughout the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ensure that all critical terms are clearly explained and relevant to the research context. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), the key terms provide definitions for terms that are central to the study, such as 'policy impact' or 'training outcomes', and so on. The major constructs that constitute the framework of your inquiry are the key terms.

Theory of Change

The Theory of Change provides a framework for understanding how and why your research will lead to the desired outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). It outlines the expected changes and the processes through which they will occur. While writing Theory of Change, you are expected to describe the theory underpinning your research, including the mechanisms through which changes are expected to happen and the outcomes you aim to achieve (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In conclusion, Chapter I is crucial in framing the research problem and establishing the context for the entire thesis. By providing a detailed background, articulating the research objectives, and identifying the research questions and hypotheses, this chapter ensures a clear and focused direction for the study. The analysis of existing gaps and the Theory of Change offer a robust foundation that informs the subsequent chapters, particularly the literature review and methodology. Through a systematic and well-defined introduction, you can effectively communicate the importance and potential impact of your study, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive and coherent exploration of the research problem.

Performing Review of Literature in Chapter II

Chapter II should be aimed at presenting the existing body of knowledge, providing a critical review of the literature that forms the theoretical and conceptual backbone of the research. This chapter explores various conceptual and theoretical perspectives, reviews relevant policies, and examines empirical studies related to the research topic. By assessing best practices and case studies, the literature review identifies key insights and patterns that inform the study. The development of a conceptual framework synthesizes these elements, offering a clear roadmap for the research. This comprehensive review not only situates the study within the existing academic discourse but also highlights the unique contributions and potential advancements that the research aims to achieve.

Introduction to the Literature Review

In the beginning, you should explain the purpose of the literature review and its significance in the research process. Presenting a quick outline of the sequential structure of the literature review is mostly recommended.

Review of Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives

In this section, you should attempt to review the conceptual perspectives that are likely to be part of your conceptual framework of inquiry. You need to explain how these frameworks inform your research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Bryman, 2016). Similarly, while presenting the theoretical perspectives, you need to present and discuss the theories that are relevant to your research. Clearly explain how these theories inform your study.

Review of Related Policies

In this section, you are expected to review relevant policies related to your research topic. Discuss their implications and relevance to your study (Birkland, 2019; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2015). This is the right opportunity for you to identify and discuss any gaps or inconsistencies in these policies that your research may address.

Review of Related Studies

While reviewing related studies, your work should be guided by two perspectives – assessment of empiricism, and assessment of methodological approaches. In presenting empirical studies, you should try to summarize the key findings from existing research related to your area of interest of research. While doing so, please be cautious to organize the literature thematically or chronologically as Yin (2018) suggests. Along with each piece of review of related studies, it is advised to discuss the methodologies used in these studies and their relevance to your research (Silverman, 2020).

Assessment of Best Practices and Case Studies

Another equally important dimension serving as an integral part of paradigm shifts in modern research is the review or assessment of best practices as pragmatic knowledge elements. For this, you need to identify and discuss best practices relevant to your research topic. Explain how these practices can inform your study, suggests Patton (2015), whereas Stake (1995) complements performing relevant case studies that provide insights into your research. You, as a researcher for a new beginning, must discuss their findings and implications for your study.

Development of Conceptual Framework

By this stage, you must be very clear about the key concepts and variables governing the research of your interest. Here, you need to define the key concepts and variables in your study. Explain the relationships between them (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Finally, to articulate the inter-relational magnitude and direction of these constructs, you need to craft a visual representation of your conceptual framework as applicable.

Thus, Chapter II provides a thorough and critical examination of the literature, establishing a solid theoretical and empirical foundation for the research. By reviewing conceptual and theoretical perspectives, related policies, empirical studies, and best practices, this chapter identifies the strengths and gaps in existing knowledge. The development of a conceptual framework integrates these insights, guiding the research design and methodology in the subsequent chapter. Through a systematic and detailed literature review, you can ensure that your study is grounded in established knowledge while also addressing the gaps and challenges identified in the existing research.

Establishing Research Methodology in Chapter III

Chapter III outlines the research methodology, detailing the philosophical underpinnings, research design, strategies, and data collection and analysis methods employed in the study. This chapter begins by explaining the purpose and significance of the chosen methodology, linking it to the research objectives. The discussion on research philosophy provides a foundational understanding, while the research approach and design offer a structured plan for conducting the study. The selected research strategy and data collection and analysis methods are described in detail, ensuring the study's validity and reliability. By addressing socio-ethical considerations, this chapter ensures that the research adheres to ethical standards and contributes responsibly to the field of study.

Introduction

To introduce the chapter, briefly explain its purpose and provide an overview of the research methodology to be used in the proposed study, with relevant justification of the choice of methods and techniques. While working on it, try to link to research objectives with an explanation of how the methodology aligns with the research objectives outlined in previous chapters.

Research Philosophy

Define what research philosophy is most suited to the area of your research interest and why it is important (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), followed by a precise discussion of the chosen research philosophy (for example, positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, realism, and so on) and justify why it is appropriate for your research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Along this, you need to explain how this philosophy impacts your research approach, design, and execution.

In addition to this, at this stage, you need to reflect on how your chosen research philosophy aligns with ethical considerations and social responsibilities. Discuss any potential ethical dilemmas and how you plan to address them.

Research Approach

Define what research approaches you intend to undertake in the interest of research and describe the main types (for example, deductive, inductive, and abductive) (Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2016) supported with reasonable explanation. For instance, if you are testing an existing theory, you might choose a deductive approach; if you are generating a new theory, an inductive approach might be more suitable. At the same time, you need to be tactful in explaining how your research approach aligns with your chosen research philosophy. Finally, you should provide a detailed plan of action for implementing your chosen approach, including key steps, timelines, milestones, and deliverables as applicable.

Research Design

Robson (2011) is straightforward in recommending defining research design and discussing its importance. Babbie (2013) further suggests describing different types of research designs (for example, experimental, quasi-experimental, descriptive, correlational, and so on) and discussing their applicability in the research of interest. State and justify your chosen research design. Explain how it aligns with your research questions and objectives. Finally, discuss socio-ethical considerations related to your research design, such as informed consent, confidentiality, any potential risks to participants, and proposed ways forward for mitigation from your end.

Research Strategy

Here, you need to be quite pinpointed to define what a research strategy is and explain its importance in achieving the research objectives (Yin, 2018). After selecting a suitable strategy, discuss it clearly (for example, performing a case study, survey, experiment, ethnography, or else) and justify its appropriateness. Along this, you need to provide a detailed plan for implementing the chosen strategy, including steps, resources needed, and potential challenges. Again, please be mindful to reflect on the ethical implications of your chosen research strategy, including any potential conflicts of interest, power dynamics, and the impact of your research on participants and communities.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Briefly describe the suitable methods you will use to collect data (for example, surveys, interviews, observations, document analysis, and so on) and justify the choice of each method (Flick, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Explain the methods you will use to analyze the data (for example, statistical analysis, thematic analysis, content analysis, etc.) with justification of the choice of each method.

It is equally crucial to discuss how you will ensure the validity and reliability of your data collection and analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Add in it a precise discussion of the ethical considerations related to data collection and analysis, including issues of consent, confidentiality, and data security.

In conclusion, Chapter III is essential in outlining the research methodology, and providing a clear and detailed plan for conducting the study. By explaining the research philosophy, approach, design, strategy, and data collection and analysis methods, this chapter ensures that the research is methodologically sound and ethically responsible. The focus on socio-ethical considerations underscores the importance of conducting research that is not only academically rigorous but also socially and ethically conscious. Through a well-defined methodology, you can ensure that your research is robust, credible, and capable of addressing the research problem effectively.

Conclusions

The preparation of a thesis is a complex and multifaceted endeavor that requires careful planning and execution. By following the guidelines outlined in this article, you can craft a comprehensive and coherent thesis that effectively communicates your research findings and contributions. The chapters on Introduction, Review of Literature, and Research Methodology are crucial components that lay the foundation for your study, ensuring that it is theoretically grounded, methodologically sound, and contextually relevant. By adhering to these principles, you can enhance the academic rigor and practical impact of your research, contributing valuable insights to your field of study.

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