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BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

GUIDELINES IN PREPARING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Research proposals contain many, at times different or varying features dictated by the respective disciplines. The differences give them discipline peculiarities or/and specialties. However, on the whole, there are three common salient features to all the disciplines. The major features are divided into three sections namely;

 (i) THE PRELIMINARIES
 (ii) THE BODY OR MAIN TEXT
 (iii) THE REFERENCES

Each of the above three sections has its components as follows;

I. THE PRELIMINARIES; Basically include;

1. Title Page
2. Declaration and Recommendation Page
3. The Abstract. Table of Contents, List of figures, List of abbreviations

II. THE BODY OR MAIN TEXT: Has components which mostly include the following in various sequences:

4. Introduction/context of background of the study
5. The statement of the problem
6. Objectives
7. Hypothesis of hypotheses/Premises/ Assumptions
8. Research questions
9. Justification/significance of the study
10. Definition of terms
11. Literature review
12. Theoretical framework/conceptual framework
13. Scope/limitations/assumptions
14. Research Methodology
15. Work plan
16. Budget
17. References
18. Appendices

 III. THE REFERENCES

IV. APPENDICES

SUGGESTED CONTENT OUTLINES WHICH SHOULD BE ADOPTED OR MODIFIED
TO
SUIT INDIVIDUAL ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

1. TITLE PAGE: On top should bear the title of the proposal in caps.

    THE TITLE

(i)   Should be short, precise, concise and clear ranging between seven (7) and
         fifteen (15) words.
(ii)   Should relate to the subject matter of the proposal and well contextualised
(iii)   Should be 'captivating' or capturing the reader's attention at a glance
    - The title should be followed by the author's names.
    -   Next should come the citation "A Research proposal submitted to the Graduate
School in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the ---------- Name of the Certificate---
---- Degree in -------------Name of Discipline -------------- of Laikipia University
    -       This is followed by LAIKIPIA UNIVERSITY just above the month and year
    -   Finally should come the month and the year of presentation/submission.

2. THE DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION PAGE: In which author
    candidate/student swears that the work is original and has not been presented before.
    This is followed by the 'Recommendation' section where the supervisor(s) declare
    that the work has been presented with their approval. The COD and Dean sign on the
    accompanying form only and not on this
    Page.

3. (a) The Abstract: Should follow the declaration/recommendation page and the
    word "Abstract"
    should be in caps, bold and cantered…
    (i)   The purpose of the abstract is to give an interested reader a compact summary
             of the proposal content.
    (ii)   The abstract should be a summary, synopsis or gist of the whole work
             presented.
    (iii)   An abstract should be one paragraph or maximum of one paragraph, double
             spaced with no quotations or references, and at most 300 words.
    (iv)   If the work is not in English, the writer should provide an English translation
             of the abstract.
    (v)   Pagination of all the above is Roman numbers. Lowercase, numerals.

    (b) Table of Contents
-   This page serves as a synopsis of the structure pattern of the report and should come
    after the abstract.
-   All major sections (chapter level headings) including bibliography, and appendices
    must be included. However, if the report is long, sub-headings may be included.
-   The headings as listed in the Table of Contents must be worded exactly as they
    appear in the body of proposal

- The wording and presentation (i.e. capitalization, special fonts and chapters etc.) used for all entries in the table of contents must match exactly that which is used in the text.

   (c)   List of Tables
- If the proposal contains a lot of tables, a separate page should be provided for the list of tables giving numbering, the tables, the exact title and the page numbers where it may be found in the body of the report.
- The table title should indicate the Chapter and number of the table viz; Table 4.1 indicates Table 1 in Chapter 4.
- List of tables should be separated from the table of contents and should follow immediately after the table of contents.

All entries must contain a corresponding page number with leader dots or dashes connecting the entry to the page number.

For example;

2.1 Introduction...16

   (d)   List of Figures
- These lists are governed by the same rules as the list of tables and come after the list of tables.
- The figures may include graphs, photographic illustrations, maps, and drawings.

   (e)   List of Symbols/Abbreviations/Definitions
- These come after the list of figures

All symbols and abbreviation for scientific terms used in the report are listed on this page and their full interpretations given and the units where appropriate.

4.   INTRODUCTION/CONTEXT OF BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This should be brief and clear to give the reader an overview/insight of the work.

(i)   This is either a scenario that culminates in including, provoking or creating the scholar's curiosity or urge to study the current subject.

(ii)   OR the historical development of whatever nature, scientific, sociological, economical etc which have necessitated the study.

(iii)   The introduction provides critical definitions to orient the reader.

(iv) The background to the study should indicate the author's points of entry into the proposed research aligned to the objectives.

(v)   A well laid down context of, background to the problem, brings about a sound understanding of the problem or rather exposes/surfaces the same.

(iv) An exercise of discipline is required to keep the introduction and context of background to the problem separate. However, depending on the nature of nature of the problem, it is acceptable to mix under one of the above sub-titles usually introduction.

5.   THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is an undisputed fact THE PROBLEM is the core or heart of any research project. If the student does not understand the problem, there are only remote chances, if any, of success. When adequately understood as portrayed through the statement, achieving it is easy, less expensive and actually enjoyable. Therefore;
- The problem must be clearly stated to stand out conspicuously, unequivocally and in a focused manner.
- Avoid preambles, wandering and irrelevancies.

- To achieve a sound and acceptable statement of a problem, one does not need two or three paragraphs. One paragraph, even a sentence or two in most cases are enough.
- The statement of the problem is not set of stated objectives.
- The statement of the problem indicates the GAP IN KNOWLEDGE which the author seeks to fill.

6. OBJECTIVES

- Objectives of a research are like aims and goals of research. Some researchers may have short term and long term objectives/general and specific objective.
- Appropriate objectives enable the elucidation and focusing on, the data that helps in the solving of the research problem.
- Objectives also provide the intellectual scope of a proposal or research work. Consequently, the objectives should be stated unequivocally and as activities whose result will solve the problem(s).
- Objectives must be SMART;

7. HYPOTHESIS OR HYPOTHESES /PREMISE/ASSUMPTIONS

- A hypothesis is basically a guiding principal to an argument that leads to a final proved or established conclusion. The hypothesis should be testable.
- In the social sciences where mostly the hypothesis is difficult to measure, the principle is an assumption, assertion or an issue taken for granted: Hence the use of the names assumption, premise and hypothesis.
- A proposal could have one or more premises /hypotheses.
- One common quality of the premises, especially in the social sciences, is that the principles can be confirmed true or disapproved.
- In the social sciences, the premise can be replaced by other terms of the proposal such as hypothesis.

8. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Like objectives, research questions are very useful in eliciting the required data if properly structured and implemented.
- The question should, therefore, be structured to bring clarity of what the question requires as well as the focus on relevance. Long and complicated questions do not achieve much.
- The research question should be related to the objective.
- It is not necessary to have research questions and hypotheses since both are related to the objectives. Thus the author needs to choose either hypotheses or research questions.

9. JUSTIFICATION /SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- It is indisputable that research is expensive both in terms of money and time. One should, therefore, establish the need or relevance of the research to account for the expense.
- One should justify that the findings will benefit consumers who could be individuals, groups, Policy makers, scholars, etc.
- The significance can be summed up by the question; who will benefit from your study and in what way?
- Mainly, it should be shown that the findings would contribute to new knowledge.

10. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Terms which are used in the text and are not obvious should be defined. These terms are also referred to as 'key words' in related literature.

11. LITERATURE REVIEW

- Literature review can be viewed as a selective and critical survey of written works of the subject area. These include articles, books and unpublished papers.
- Literature review should include current research works.
- The review should be a critical analysis of the selected works to reveal the done and the untouched, therefore revealing the gaps in knowledge that require filling.
- The review provides aspects of background information which jump-starts the research, reveals the work to readers.
- The review is useful in providing the theoretical framework(s) and finally used to bring about the pursued results.
- The review, above all, buttresses the researcher's statement of the problem by revealing that the subject of the proposal is untouched or not done as proposed.
- The review is, therefore, a must, should be exhaustive, thorough, critical and informative.
- The review should clearly show gaps and /or direction for further research.
- References cited here must contain the name or names (at most two, otherwise use et al.) and the year in bracket.
- The sub-themes in the literature review should derive from the objectives.
- In other words the alignment to the objectives observed in the background to the study should be maintained in the literature review.

12. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK/CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK

- It is in this section where the researcher explains the major theories that exist on tackling the problem. Both the out-dated and modern theories should be discussed, revealing the merits, demerits and limitation of each.
- The researcher finally chooses one new or a modification of the same or modification of several as his /her model in solving research problem.
- The choice should be convincingly justified. A clear plan on how to steer the work, should be shown here.
- This section is important because it relates and coordinates the literature review, the problem, the significance of the study and the objectives to the next major topics, the methodology.
- The theory provides the guiding principles of the study and is therefore the foundation of the study, the mirror, and the lens through which the study is seen.

13. SCOPE /LIMITATIONS/ASSUMPTIONS

- This is a normally a review of the extent the research will take pegged on many issues such as area – geographical and intellectual, duration and timing, resources and research design.
- It therefore justifies what and why work will be done as expressed.
- It portrays the expected results under the circumstance.
- It disciplines and helps to focus the research within the practicabilities (what is pragmatic, what is doable).

14. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
- This is a section where the results bring either the failure or achievement of the study.
- This section is commonly called methodology, methods of study or materials and methods depending on the discipline.
- It is here where the researcher describes as fully as possible the procedure to be used in eliciting data throughout the work the up to the final stage which includes analyzing the data and compiling the same for the consumer.
- The researcher must clearly indicate the research design (cross-sectional, longitudinal, case study, etc) and provide justification for the choices made
- Different types of researches in both the same and different disciplines demand specific tools and methods to succeed. It is in this section that the researcher shows what his/her particular research will use and how one will go about doing the search, till the data is ready for consumption.
- The section should be so well written that the reader could do the same work guided by the write-up
- Study area (in some discipline should show scope, location and, sample and sampling procedures and population)
- This section should clearly outline the data collection tools (e.g. questionnaire, interview, observation etc and the accompanying question guides as appendices).
- The data analysis and interpretation procedures should also be clearly explained.

15. ANTICIPATED/EXPECTED FINDINGS
- This section must clearly and logically flow from the literature and hypotheses.
- It is important that you have some preliminary ideas about the outcomes of the study and this involves making clear the implications for theory and practice.

16. WORK PLAN
- The work plan is simple and is useful in guiding the research to keep at pace with plan of the research.
- The work plan is presented in timed sub-topics connoting activities of the research.
- It is more useful to limit oneself by calendar months and years as opposed to blocks of periods to consume a period of years.
- The work plan should come after research methodology.

17. BUDGET
- The budget is an essential component of the proposal as it represents the identity of the researcher. Is should be detailed and relevant and should account for the value and cost of the project.
- Be as realistic as possible given global and local economic realities.
- Everything in the budget should be itemized. The item will include stationery, transport, subsistence, research assistants, cost of production of the final documents to incidentals.
- An addition of the total cost, usually 10% is made to cater for fluctuations.
- A budget should come after the work plan and before references.

18. REFERENCES
- This contains the list of references (mainly in APA) cited in the text as well as other relevant references.
- The list should be in alphabetical order in terms of the author(s) and years.

- The names of the authors (surnames and initials) should be given followed by the year in brackets. This is then followed by the title of the article /book; place of publication and name of publishers For Journal articles, volume, pages should then follow. The Journal name should be in italics.
- Place of publication and name of publisher are NOT given for journal articles

19. <u>APPENDICES</u>
- All materials which do not fit easily or break the flow of the mainstream of the body or text but are relevant to the work as a whole should be retained as appendices and placed at the appropriate section.
- The appendices are placed after the references/bibliography.
- Questionnaires and interview guides should appear in the appendix.

<u>GENERAL COMMENTS</u>

- Only major division or chapters should begin on a new page.
- Within a chapter, the presentation of sub-sections must be continuous.
- Partially filled pages of text are not acceptable, only non-textual page such as those presenting tables and illustrations.
- Wherever the heading of a section or subsection appears near the bottom of a page, it must be followed by least one complete line of text, or the heading should be forced to the top of next page.
- Detailed organization of the text varies among academic disciplines. However, the formatting of the text must be consistent throughout.
- The proposal should not be more than thirty (30) pages excluding the appendices.
- Pages for items 2 and 3 should be numbered in Roman numerals, while the pages for item 4 (Introduction) onwards should be in Arabic numerals.
- All page numberings should be bottom centred in same font as text (Times New Roman Font size 12).