

A Guide to Write Research Proposal for Management and Social Science Research

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Abstract

When any scholar first time have curiosity to start research for master course or doctor of philosophy course, then scholar requires to first prepare and submit his research proposal for dissertation or thesis purpose. At this stage as beginner scholar faces problem regarding how to start research work and prepare research proposal. This paper aim to explore about preparation of research proposal. Various terms such as abstract, introduction, literature review, research gap, research questions, research hypotheses, detailed research methodology, procedure for conduct research and tentative chapters of research outcomes etc become the part of research proposal and what does it means are explained in details. On concluding point, it can be said that this entire article will very helpful to early-stage researchers for starting their research by writing research proposals especially in management, commerce and other social science domain.

Keywords

Research proposal, Social Science Research, Research Plan, Synopsis, Conceptual Framework, Research

I. Prologue

Research proposal is a roadmap and outline about proposed research work. A research proposal must have value relevance (Brian, 2014) and elaborate all about when, why and how research will be completed (Boyd, 1998). Although, there is no specific or uniform format for research proposal, it is prepared on the basis of best practices followed by a particular research institute or universities etc. A good research proposal has conceptual structure (Kabir, 2016) and clearly states that how a research work will be done and thesis/dissertation or project report will be prepared. As per best practices a good research proposal contains twelve to fifteen contents/headings. For example, research proposal is prepared by a PhD research scholar, there is no need to give information about Man power for study and Budget for study because only supervisor(s) is allotted to the scholar, there is no provision to allot additional staff to a PhD scholar. The details regarding various key elements of research proposal with detailed description and suitable examples may be understood from heading two to heading eight as under.

II. Title Page, Introduction and Review of Literature

2.1 Title Page

Title page is the first page of research proposal, sometimes called as cover page or facing page. This page reflects about title of research proposal, purpose of writing a research proposal, name of researcher and his supervisor and name of affiliating research institute with year. This should be written as under. Name of topic should be written in fourteen to sixteen font size, upper case and in bold text at the centre of the page after leaving two to three lines blank from the top. Title having up to sixteen words with ability to attract readers is considered as good. Topic of research should be sound and capable to attract the readers (Zondi, 2018).

Purpose of research proposal should be written after leaving the space of two or three blank lines from topic at the centre of page. For example, PhD scholar prepares research proposal for PhD thesis, scholar should write as a research proposal is submitted for registration of degree of doctor of philosophy in subject.

Logo of research institute/university may be used as per policy of related institute as some institute restricts the use its logo as internal policy matter of institute.

Name of Researcher should be written after use of logo, if allowed by the research institute. Researcher name must contain the designation of researcher like master degree student, PhD research scholar or post-Doctoral researcher etc as the case may be.

Name of Supervisor/Guide with designation like Associate Professor or Professor etc at place parallel to the name of researcher or after left out the two to three lines space as feel fit by the researcher. In case research work is also supported by a co-supervisor, in this case the name of research co-supervisor should also be written before the name of supervisor. Name of Research Institute or university should be written after the name of research supervisor in thirteen to fourteen font size. It is usually written after spacing two to three lines from bottom of the page with address of the institute. Year or Session of the research should also be written at centre after the name and place of affiliating institution. As per best practices in case of research proposal for fulfilment of Master degree course, the session should be written and in case of PhD, year of writing of research proposal should be written.

2.2 Table of Contents

Table of contents or index is useful to quick access on the contents of research proposal. Index clearly reflect that where the particular data located, so the user of the research proposal can reach on the content without wasting the time in searching step by step. Index is prepared in tabulating format usually with three to four columns. It may be prepared in running order without tabulating format as per convenience or practices as followed at researcher's affiliating institute.

2.3 Abstract

An abstract reflects summary about the annexed work. It is usually written in one paragraph with 250-300 words for research proposal and provides overview about proposed research work. In real practices, sometimes abstract for a research proposal is not needed, but as per best practices abstract is an integral part of research proposal and reflects overall look about research proposal. Abstract with research proposal is helpful to members of research degree committee etc. There are two types of abstracts used in research proposals such as descriptive and informative. Descriptive type of abstract is very short usually 100 to 150 words in size and outline about the how work will be carried out. The informative abstracts are heavy in size as compare to descriptive abstracts and explain in details about work will be done by researcher.¹The abstract is written for following three purposes.

Intended research work

Abstract for intended research work means, research work is not started and abstract is being written for work which yet to start.

Ongoing research work

This type of abstract is written when, research work is started but not completed.

Completed research work

This abstract is written, when research work is completed and submit with final research report in form of dissertation or thesis etc.

In case of research proposal, research work is only intended, therefore abstract for intended research work should be written and includes key elements in running order. Reason for writing, means the reason for proposed research. Why is it useful to conduct the research as proposed in research proposal. Major Problem of research, that has to be addressed. This includes the major research problem, on which research is based. Methodology of research, this part reflects brief about methodology proposed to address the research problem or to attaining the research objectives. The various sources of data and research tools etc should also be explained as a part of abstract later on in running order. Proposed Outcomes of research is required to be written, because research proposal proposes the research work, so the proposed outcomes that researcher feels and will probably arise must be written in abstract to make abstract more attractive, scientific and useful.

2.4 Introduction

Introduction part of research proposal contains everything about how researcher identifies the research problem. It explains the broad discipline about research area and broad discussion in running order leading to

core area of research that is to be addressed by researcher in concise manner (Karanja, 2016). Although the introduction part of research proposal found in the starting part of research proposal, but it must be written after extensive review of literature on the area of topic. Introduction contains the background and context of research problem (Sidik, 2005). The introduction should include meaning of the particular research area and what about the current status of research in this particular area and how researcher motivates to conduct research in this particular area. Introduction also explains about the present research gap, something that is not studied till date and has relevance to conduct study for particular domain.ⁱⁱ

For example, researcher wants to know about need of regulatory reforms in agriculture finance. For addressing this issue related to agriculture finance, researcher must introduce about the agriculture finance, which scheme is operated in current scenario like Kisan (Farmers) Credit Card, Farm Machinery Loan, Cash Credit and loan schemes for allied activities related to agriculture. After meaning the researcher must explain about the current disbursal system of agriculture finance regarding how and to whom an agriculturist can approach to obtain loan for agriculture activities. What is present regulatory framework on agriculture finance and how an aggrieved farmer can approach to the authority? What is the main objective of study and how research gap found after reviewing the existing literature on agriculture finance? As a primary data source which type of data collection tool will be followed by researcher after considering the fact that agriculturist is not so educated in rural areas, whether interviews as tool of data collection will better or questionnaire will better for data collection. If questionnaire tool for data collection is adopted then structure questionnaire will be used or unstructured questionnaire will be used to collect the primary data. Brief profile of selected samples should also be explained in introduction part of research proposal.

Another aspect like scope and limitation of study must be explained in brief by researcher in introduction. On the basis of above stated discussion, we can say that introduction must contains all relevant material related to proposed research, so reader can understand the overview of proposed research problem.

2.5 Review of Literature

Review of literature creates base for proposed research, it includes viewing or findings of existing workings on research available in the form of scholarly articles, thesis, dissertations and conference proceedings etc as scientific evidence pertaining to the topic of interest (Sudheesh *et al.*, 2016). As method of qualitative research material like legislations, acts, rules, regulations, parliamentary debates, Judgements, government reports, case reports, standard text book, reference books, legal periodicals and journals will be used to find out the present state of work in particular research area or on topic. Review of Literature sometimes called as present state of knowledge. Now the question arises that from where to collect the literature or existing material available on particular area? To address this issue, we shall visit the following places for collecting the literature.

Library, here the material is available in physical form. There are several libraries with rich collection.

E-Library, from starting of twenty first century, we are witnessed with rapid information and Communication Technology development, so now days with physical settings of library, various online databases are available with large collection and are maintained by research institutions. Researcher can approach to the particular e-library according to his need as per procedure laid down by the concerned library owner institution or organisation.

Websites, Various peer reviewed scholarly indexed articles are available on website of concerned journals and various government reports are available on respective government website. After collecting the literature through above mentioned sources, next step to classified it in various segments like direct related to our topic or objective of research and allied to our research topic. After attaining the usefulness of literature to our study, researcher must compile this literature at appropriate place whether in electronic form or in physical form.

Reliability and authenticity are very important concerns related to review of literature; it means literature must be authenticated and reliable. Literature, which are used by us must be obtained through authentic sources and written by an expert person of related field.

Review of literature may be called as good if it reflects its all characters like comprehensiveness, well referenced, relevance, selective, synthesis, balance and analytical (Bolderston, 2008). Now questions how to select the material of review of literature and how literature is read?

To understand the article first idea can be taken from the abstract part of literature as abstract of an article reflects brief about the introduction, research problem, methodology adopted by researcher and findings of the study. If researcher is not able to understand about the literature after reading the abstract then researcher must go the introduction part, objective and research question, detailed methodology adopted by researcher and finding, conclusion and suggestions of the study.

There are basically three ways to present the literature review in research proposal, which are as under.

Chronological order, Researcher in need to first decide about chronological order whether he want to present the literature in new to old or old to new order. For example, researcher preparing the research proposal in 2019 and he has literature, which was published in between 2009 to 2019, now at this stage researcher must decide whether he want to present the literature from 2019 to 2009 or 2009 to 2019.

Segments type presentation, under this way of presentation, researcher first requires to bifurcate the literature in various parts, it is usually three to four parts and then writes literature related to particular part after quoting the subheading of particular part. For example, researcher is conducting the study related to need of regulatory reforms in agriculture finance, now in this case researcher may divide the presentation of literature in two parts positive or supporting findings in favour of regulatory reforms and negative finding with respect to regulatory reforms.

Hybrid method, under this method, researcher may use chronological method as well as segments method simultaneously.

Now talk about the writing of citations for literature used in research proposal, the purpose of citation, first we use the last name of author with year of publication. If particular article is authored by two authors, in this case last name of each author should be bifurcated by 'and' with year of publication. In case of article is authored by three or more authors, the last name of first author should be used with et al. and year of publication.

III. Statement of Problem, Motivation, Scope of Proposed Research Work

3.1 Statement of Problem

Statement of problem is also called as need of the study. Researcher should identify the research gap after detailed review of literature. This research gap may be defined as statement of problem. Statement of problem mainly explains why researcher wants to conduct the study on the particular topic. A detailed review of literature is essential to write statement of problem. It is all about the problem that will be addressed by researcher and why researcher will want to conduct the study. On the concluding point we can say that statement of problem is about how researcher is curious to conduct the study on particular domain. Statement of problem must contain about how things are being done and how it should be done.

3.2 Motivation to the Study

This part is an option to researcher as few researchers write this part in research proposal separately and others explain this part in statement of problem. This part mainly explains about the efficiency and capability scholar to conduct the study. Researcher's motivation may be by virtue of other's findings on the particular issue, familiar area of research supervisor in case of post graduate and PhD research and other feasibility about the research topics. For example, in case of study on the topic need of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance, the knowledge of bad practices of institutions for providing agriculture finance to the farmers and availability of farmers easily to collect primary data etc may create motivation to conduct the study on need of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance.

3.3 Scope of Study

The scope of the study indicates to extent of area to be covered in proposed study. Scope of study means coverage of area in proposed research and also the parameters on which study will be based. All things that will be carried out to attaining the objectives of study are described in the scope of study. The goals of the study with all materials that will be touched by the researcher should be explained in the scope of the study. For example, if researcher proposed to conduct the study on need of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance, in this case the scope of study may be understand as area of sample, farmers and employee of agriculture finance institutions that will be consulted for the study and should be disclosed in the scope of study section of research proposal. To elaborate further, researcher is required to write the methods or techniques that will be used by researcher to consult with farmers like survey, questionnaire and interviews etc. For the purpose of obtaining the perception of institutions employee feasibility to reach with employees and methods like interview structured or unstructured questionnaire etc should be written in the scope of the study. The researcher should also explain about the geographical locations and time limit of study.

3.3 Objectives of Study

After writing above mentioned contents like introduction, review of literature, statement of problem and scope of the study, researcher is required to disclose about the specific core objectives in clear, concise and feasible manner. Central goal or purpose may be written as objectives of the study after considering the aim of the proposed study. The objectives of the study are emerged from the background and literature review of research problem.ⁱⁱⁱ

Number of objectives fully depends upon the time, nature and purpose of study. For example, if research is being conducted to publish research article, then two to three objectives are enough to cover the problem, but in case of research proposal is prepared for post graduate dissertation, three to four objectives and for PhD research purpose five to six objectives are enough to attaining the goal of proposed study. For example, researcher is proposing to conduct the study on need of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance for the purpose of master degree dissertation, in this case the objectives may be framed as under.

- To find out the current status of regulatory framework on agriculture finance.
- To study the perception of stakeholders like agriculturist and institution's employee of agriculture finance.
- To suggest regulatory frameworks for smooth functioning of agriculture financing institutions.

The objectives as stated above are for master degree dissertation, if researcher want to conduct this study for PhD thesis purpose, then researcher may increase above three objectives to five/six objectives.

IV. Major Research Questions and Hypotheses

4.1 Major Research Questions

The major reasons and questions in researcher's mind while to choose the particular topic and area of research may be written as research questions. This is all about the major problems that will be addressed in research or main reason for conducting the research. There is no specific limit of research questions but every research question must be justified with research objectives, there may one question for one objective or more than one questions for one objective. For given example need of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance, the research questions may be as under.

- Whether current regulatory framework on agriculture finance is enough to meet the need of farmers?
- Whether current regulatory framework provides more formalities to obtain loan by a farmer?
- Whether employees of agriculture financing institutions are able to act their duties smoothly according to current regulatory framework.
- Which Geographical location is suitable to conduct the study on this particular issue?

The above stated research questions are for sample purpose, researcher may have more research questions in his/her mind.

4.2 Research Hypothesis

A research hypothesis is predictive perception, idea or explanation of researcher about possible outcomes of the study. The research hypothesis should be clear, specific, testable proposition and based on particular property of population. It may be in groups of variables or between different variables. The hypothesis should testable and based scientifically.

Framing hypothesis and its testability makes study more scientific. There are two types of hypotheses first one is Null and another is alternative hypothesis. Null hypothesis means when there is no significant relationship between the variable exists. Alternative hypothesis means when there is significant relationship between the variables exists. Null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis may be written in symbols as H_0 and H_1 respectively. For example, need of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance, the hypotheses may be written as under.

H_0 There is no significant directional perception of farmers regarding existing regulatory framework on agriculture finance.

H_1 There is significant directional perception of farmers regarding existing regulatory framework on agriculture finance.

H_0 There is no significant directional perception of agriculture finance institutions' employees regarding agriculture finance.

H_1 There is significant directional perception of agriculture finance institutions' employees regarding agriculture finance.

The above stated hypotheses are for example purpose, researcher may frame more hypotheses during course of study as per the requirement to give scientific base to the findings of study.

V. Research Methodology

Research methodology is backbone for research study and explains all about the data collection, procedure of collection, analysis tools and process for doing it and also. The research methodology planning is the most important and significant step for a research proposal because findings of our study will purely depend upon the research methodology adopted by a researcher to attain the objectives. Researcher must be very careful at the time of deciding methodology for proposed research. The research methodology part of research proposal may be subdivided in the following parts.

5.1 Research Design

This part explains all about the research methodology that is to be adopted by researcher like doctrinal study, non-doctrinal study or empirical study etc. This part also explains about the types of research like descriptive research method, analytical or explanatory research etc. In our above stated example need of regulatory reforms in agriculture finance, we can say that this research will adopt doctrinal as well as non-doctrinal or empirical research method as study will focus in details about the existing literature or regulatory framework on agriculture finance as well as obtain the perception of various stakeholders regarding agriculture finance.

5.2 Sample Size and Selection Criteria

Sample size and selection criteria of proposed research with justification must be explained in research proposal. This part of research proposal state about the geographical area and other samples in details with justification regarding why researcher is selecting this particular geographical area or sample for study purpose. Researcher is suggested to avoid the adoption of convenience sampling at the time of selection of sample for proposed research work. For example, if researcher is selecting the sample for need of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance in particular state of country, now researcher must explain all about that why researcher is taking particular state for study purpose. This may be due to feasibility or conveyance of researcher or knowledge about the particular area. To address the second issue that to whom farmers or agriculture finance institution employees will be contacted to collect primary data such as small farmers or marginal farmers and top level or executive level official of agriculture financing institutions etc.

5.3 Data Collection

There are two sources of data collection, primary and secondary data sources as per requirement, problem, objective and hypothesis of study. Primary Source of data is collected through surveys, interviews, questionnaires and legislations etc. Secondary source of data is collected through various journals and periodicals websites, libraries and government websites etc. The research publications already published by other researcher is the best and popular example of secondary course of data. For study, need of regulatory reform on agriculture finance, data may be collected from primary as well as from secondary sources. Various research publications on the issue and data available in form of govt agencies report will be collected as secondary data and perception of farmers and employees of agriculture finance institutions will be obtained through interview or questionnaire are considered as primary data.

5.4 Duration of Study

This part explains about duration of data, that will be considered for study purpose such as two, five or ten years etc. For example, need of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance, the loan provided by institutions during last particular period like five years or ten years etc may be considered for study purpose.

5.5 Research Methods and Tools

This part of research proposal explains about the research tools that will be used by researcher for data analysis purpose. There is various statistical software like SPSS etc are available and may be used for data analysis purpose. Researcher also explain about all statistical tools like ANOVA, and t-test etc for data analysis and hypotheses testing purpose.

5.6 Proposed Procedure of Study

This part is purely optional to be a part of research proposal. If researcher feels to provide procedure depends upon the choice of researcher. This part explains brief steps or procedure to be done for attaining the objectives of study. For example, the study needs of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance will be carried out with three specific objectives and the procedure for the same may be written in following points.

- First, researcher understands about the theoretical regulatory framework of agriculture finance in selected area.
- After considering the theoretical framework, researcher may plan to collect primary data from farmers and employees of the institution in form of questionnaire or by conducting interviews etc.
- After collecting the data from both sources, researcher will analyse the data and test the hypotheses with the help of relevant statistical tool.
- At the end stage researcher will suggest the regulatory reform with conclusion findings and suggestions.

VI. Relevance, Proposed Outcomes and Tentative Chapter Plan

6.1 Relevance and Proposed Outcomes

This part is important in research proposal as it reflects all about the proposed benefit that will be obtained after completion of research. Relevancy of a research can be bifurcated in two parts, first its usefulness to the society at large and second important part is how study will benefit government agencies like regulatory authorities etc for policy making. Relevance and proposed outcome are very useful to all types of research studies whether it is for masterdegree dissertation or for PhD research. If research proposal for registration of degree of doctor of philosophy is prepared by incorporating relevancy and proposed outcomes, then it will easily be pass and appreciate by members of research degree committee. The benefit of research proposal with sound relevancy and proposed outcomes not limited to the educational studies, even more beneficial to the funding research studies as proposal of funding projects approve by its proposed relevancy and outcome basis, if research proposal review committee found that it has sound proposed implications and policy making, then chance to approve such type of research proposal is always be very high.

We live in society, if proposed study will benefit the any member of society, then it will call as study will be benefitted society at large. For example, findings of study of need of regulatory reform in agriculture sector will lead the benefit to the farmers. Because the corrective measures for providing agriculture fiancé can be taken by the institutions engage in providing the agriculture fiancé. If farmers will able to get the finance on time as per need, then it will lead to develop the agriculture activities and also enhance the production. On second aspect the findings of study will also help to government departments or bodies, who are responsible for policy making like rules and regulations etc. In example, study of need of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance will helpful to government agencies or institutions for policy making and also for taking corrective measures.

6.2 Tentative Chapter Plan

Tentative chapter plan also called as tentative scheme. It contains the all details about detailed plan of thesis or dissertation of proposed research. In other words, we can say that tentative scheme provides the details or outline about the proposed topic and contains details about the chapter of research report.

The tentative plan is based on the scope, geographical area, data and timelinethat will be consumed in research study. As summary we can say that it is all about the physical research report that will be prepared based on research proposal. A standard tentative scheme provides the five to seven chapters started from Introduction and ended on conclusion findings and suggestions;however, this may vary from study-to-study basis. For example, in study need of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance, the tentative scheme may be framed as under.

Chapter-1, Introduction

Chapter-2, Review of Literature and brief about selected population

Chapter-3, Current regulatory framework on agriculture finance

Chapter-4, Stakeholders perception regarding agriculture finance

Chapter-5, Discussion and analysis

Chapter-6, Conclusion, Findings and suggestions

VII. Limitations of Study and Budget for Study

7.1 Limitations of Study

This is optional part of research proposal and depends upon the nature of proposed research work. Limitations of study mean things which will affect the study. It is all about the untouched area ofresearch that will not be addressed by the researcher, so other researcher may take this issue for his study purpose. In other words, limitation is all about the weakness, inability or lack of capacity. For example, need of regulatory reform on agriculture finance, the limitations may be in form of un connectivity to particular class of farmers or un ability to reach with the class of employees of agriculture financing institutions. Further the non-covering of particular geographical area in proposed research may call as limitations of the study. The Limitations may be due to non-competency of researcher, non-availabilityresources such as lack of finance and time etc.

7.2 Budget for the Study

It is essential to have money for every activity in modern time. Without adequate finance nothing will be done in effective manner. In same way every research study needs to have money for its smooth conducting. There is no need to write about need of budgetinresearch proposal submitted for registration of master degree or PhD degree because there is no procedure to provide fund to master degree or PhD degree level based on research proposal. In case of proposal submitted for the funding of proposed research then it is mandatory to disclose about the detailed head wise budget requirements about the proposed research work. For example, if researcher proposes to conduct the research on need of regulatory reforms on agriculture finance, in this study

