

Chapter 27

Designing a PhD Proposal in Qualitative Research

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at the main aspects of the research proposal designing in a qualitative research. The author explores a template of a research design to give a clear and well understanding about the different steps of research proposal. The author argues that there is no specific template that is universally accepted. This template includes all major aspects of a proposal in qualitative research. First, the topic provides the definitions of the main concepts such as qualitative research, research designing, and research proposal. Secondly, it provides a template that shows the key steps that a research student will follow while writing a research proposal.

INTRODUCTION

This is always a difficult task and also a challenge to a research student (either Masters or PhD) to design his/her research proposal, but most students are required to write this. Even many taught course students should enrol in at least one research methodology course as a part of their degree programmes. However, preparing a proposal is an important skill to them. Many research institutions often submit proposal in order to obtain research funding. In qualitative research, there is no universally approved template to draw this proposal. This kind of research refers to the human perception, human behaviour, human cultures, social norms and values, which are more complex and unforeseen issues. These are also varied according to time, place and context. However, a research student faces enormous challenges to write this kind of research proposal. Even though there is a wide debate whether it is possible to bring all aspects into the planning process of research designing. In general, a research proposal is a formal written plan, which accumulates ideas about a proposed study. This written document necessitates an extensive review of the literature, describing and analyzing what already has been documented related to

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the research problem (Gay, 1996). It should provide an overview of the essential information which will guide the development of the study. In a research proposal, the review of the literature should demonstrate that the researcher is entirely cognizant of the current empirical and theoretical knowledge pertaining to the proposed problem (Onwuegbugie, 1997). However, this is important to have a sound knowledge to design such project. A well-written research proposal should be concise, clear, and complete (Cook & Campbell, 1979), with ideas being logically built upon each other in order to justify a study. As such, proposal writing is a technical skill that is learned and refined with experience. Unfortunately, research indicates that compulsory writing tends to increase composition anxiety (Powers, Cook, & Meyer, 1979) that might be experienced by some students while writing a research proposal in order to fulfil a course requirement.

DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an important investigative tool in the behavioral sciences (Islam & Faruque, 2016). This kind of research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. Qualitative methods have much to offer when we need to explore people's feelings or ask participants to reflect on their experiences. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In the social sciences, qualitative research is a term that describes research that focuses on how individuals and groups view or understand the world and construct meaning out of their experiences. A number of referred definitions are mentioned below:

- Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting a detailed view of informants within their natural setting (Creswell, 1994).
- The way in which people being studied understands and interprets their social reality is one of the central motifs of qualitative research (Bryman, 1988, p. 8).
- Qualitative research based in an interpretive paradigm is exploratory in nature, thus enabling researchers to gain information about an area in which little is known (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).
- Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as “real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2001, p. 39).
- Qualitative research, broadly defined, means “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 17).
- The notion of researcher's involvement and immersion into the research by discussing that the real world are subject to change and therefore, a qualitative researcher should be present during

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