

Chapter 9


Effective Strategies for Research Proposal Development in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Writing a research proposal is a requirement for obtaining an undergraduate or postgraduate degree at institutions of higher education globally, however many students struggle to write such a proposal. This is especially true for students who are writing a proposal for the first time, despite research methodology modules that introduce them to the process. This often leads to their studies being delayed, which can result in them not graduating on time. In certain extreme cases, students withdraw from their studies because they have not completed the dissertation required to obtain their intended degree, even when they have passed their coursework. Higher education institutions could use the content of this chapter to develop appropriate targeted interventions and ongoing strategies for use by students and study supervisors to address the challenges that students face when writing their research proposals.

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INTRODUCTION

As part of the fulfilment of their degrees, both undergraduate and postgraduate students studying at higher education institutions are required to carry out research; this, of necessity, includes research proposal writing. Writing a research proposal in academia requires students to possess academic writing skills, yet many face tremendous challenges in this regard (Ashipala & Livingi, 2021). Such a proposal generally starts with an introduction, which should include a brief discussion of the background and a clear statement of the problem, thus placing the focus of the report within a broader context.

The goal of a research proposal is to present and justify a research idea, as well as discuss practical ways in which the research could be conducted. All proposals should contain an extensive literature review and provide persuasive evidence that there is a need for the research being proposed (Mapolisa & Mafa, 2012). In addition to providing a rationale for the proposed research, a proposal should include a detailed description of the methodology that will be used to conduct the research, consistent with the requirements of the professional or academic field, as well as the anticipated outcomes and/or benefits to be derived from the study. According to Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), a proposal should contain all the key elements involved in designing a complete research study, with sufficient information to allow readers to assess its validity and usefulness.

A research proposal is intended to convince the reader that the student (researcher) has an important research project, as well as the necessary competence to complete it. A high-quality research proposal not only promises success for the research project, but will also impress the research review committee regarding the student's potential as a researcher. It is important that the quality of the proposed research be assessed and possible factors that could affect the quality of academic research and future publications be addressed (Shatimwene & Ashipala, 2023). In addition, a research study is only as good as its proposal and that a poorly prepared proposal will doom the research project to failure.

A study conducted in Tanzania on research proposal writing found that most studies conducted worldwide on undergraduate training have focused on issues of supervision (Hartley & Jory, 2015; Mafa & Mapolisa, 2011; Murray, 2012; Taylor & Beasley, 2015). The limited number of studies on the challenges of writing theses or dissertations (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Lessing & Schulze, 2002; Wang & Li, 2008), meanwhile, focus on students pursuing their studies in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, but not on the African continent. Therefore, the Tanzanian study was triggered by the limited knowledge on the nature and scope of the challenges facing the majority of undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Tanzanian context when writing theses and dissertations (Komba, 2016). Komba, the author

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