

THE FORMULATION OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL IS A PROCESS

Outline

- A) Introduction
- B) Designing a research proposal
- C) Formulating research concepts
- D) Data collection and analysis issues
- E) Research proposal and its role in the success of the whole research process
- F) Conclusions
- G) Reference List

It is believed that research is one of the most important processes in social sciences. People address the research process as a complex and timely process, which comprises many parts, including the formulation of a research proposal. However, the importance of the research proposal is often neglected by the researchers. The aim of this paper is to prove the statement that the formulation of a research proposal is a process itself. The paper aims at describing the process of writing and designing a research proposal and its components – literature review, research concepts, methodology, data analysis, and results.

One of the most important issues about designing a research proposal is having a clear understanding about the whole research process. According to Vithal and Jansen (2008, p. 3), ‘being clear about the different tasks in research design facilitates the planning and preparation of a research proposal’. Talking about families and their role in educating children, research proposal has to be designed in such a way that the researcher clearly understands what results he wants to obtain from the families in order to see the extent to which they educate children. It is essentially important that research proposal reflect all the aspects of the topic, including the family structure, models of behaviour, children education, upbringing etc.

The role of families in children education determines their past, present, and future life. Therefore, research topic offers a variety of concepts to be studied. The aim of research proposal is to select, which aspects are most essential to reveal the role that families play in their children’s education.

In designing a research proposal, the researcher has to make sure that the research field is needed (families can positively influence future of their children) and feasible (families literally affect their children’s mindset) (Denscombe 2012, p. 1). The study has to be ethical due to the specifics of the research area. The issue of family and its societal role is one of the most ...

issues in social science. Therefore, the researcher needs to ensure that the morality of the issue is preserved.

Another important idea raised in literature is the need of a research proposal to be selling an idea, i.e. ‘the success of the proposal will depend in large part on how good it is at communicating the purpose of the research and persuading the audience about the value of the proposed research’ (Denscombe 2012, pp. 1-2). When talking about families and children, it is necessary to demonstrate how this topic affects society and the development of social relationships of various groups of population. Children will be likely to demonstrate their behaviour in public, thus supporting those role models proposed by parents in early childhood for them.

For this reason, designing research proposal is one of the most difficult and important steps in the whole research process, and it demands care and clarity in understanding how the research process will be carried out. Therefore, research proposal design has the same level of significance as the research design itself.

Another important step in the process of writing a research proposal is formulating the key concepts of the literature review. These concepts will later on become the concepts of the research itself. In this case, research proposal serves as a short version of a literature review chapter of the research. Without distinguishing the research concepts in the research proposal, it is not possible to preserve the unity of the research: the researcher will be tempted to include more concepts that will not correspond to the area of research.

Each research proposal as part of research process is a scientific research. Social studies have to be supported by the state-of-the-art scientific methods, which help to produce reliable and valid study results. Ogden and Goldberg (2002, p. 21) believe that ‘proposals based on faulty science are hardly even successful’. It is not enough to define that families have impact on the

education of their children and conduct data collection. It is more important to transform the data collected from the families into a scientific research based on research concepts and supporting the research topic.

Another important part of the research proposal is planning the research methodology, which is a long and complex process that is further reflected in the data collection during the research process. The nature of the data helps the researcher to choose between the basic types of data – qualitative and quantitative (Punch 2006, p. 4). Will the families be questioned and interviewed? Will the data obtained be numerical or verbal? Will the measurements be analysed in order to produce the testing of some numerical statistics, or is there a need to find out a new concept or issue in children's education? Does the number of families allow making inferences and generalizations? All these questions help to choose the best and the most effective methodology for data collection and analysis. Moreover, it is important to ensure that all families in the research are not discriminated and minorities are involved (Rubin & Babbie 2010, p. 274). Data collection should also involve a carefully selected time frame (the study of families and testing their role in children's education should correspond to the timeline of the research itself) in order to avoid further disappointment (Lategan, Lues & Friedrich-Nel 2011, p. 23).

Each research process is always centred on the data which is collected from the target population and which allows conducting empirical analysis of the measurements. Denicolo and Becker (2012, p. 29) suggest that it is important to test whether there is 'any eligibility criteria and what guidance they give about requirements for referees'. If the families that are to be tested have no children or, for some reason, have no influence on their children's education, then taking them as part of research data is pointless. For this reason, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection is proposed. Conducting interviews and surveys will help

the researcher collect the information from both the children and the parents. Such research will have strong reliability and data validity.

The fundamental meaning of the research proposal lies in setting the direction and guidance for the whole research process. Therefore, the success of each research project largely depends on the research proposal. Because research is a process that involves many stages, research proposal is a process of preparation for research. It is based on reviewing the funding opportunities, research degree opportunities, and exploring the research topic prior to the process of research (Denicolo & Becker 2012, pp. 4-6).

According to Denscombe (2012, p. 5), 'a research proposal is an important part of the research process because the success of any project depends on forward planning and organization'. Undoubtedly, planning and organization are processes which take time and involve various aspects to be taken into consideration. Having a good social issue – children's education and family role – is not enough. Research proposal needs to clearly demonstrate to the reader the whole process of the research; therefore, it involves the same amount of processes (data collection, literature review) as the research process itself.

Research proposal not only helps to foresee the research process, but it also addresses the internal and external validity of the research prior to its start. Maree and Westhuizen (2009, pp. 29-30) believe that both internal and external validity are pre-determined and planned at the stage of writing a research proposal already. Therefore, the researcher has to ask questions whether the families chosen are part of the target population, how to avoid any pressure in data collection from both families and children, etc.

Most researchers believe that good research proposal is a complex process of planning a research. Designing a research proposal requires careful preparation (Adler & Clark 2008, p. 487). Dawson (2002, p. 55) also notes that the research proposal not only shows how the

research will be conducted, but ‘sets out your ideas in an easily accessible way’. Formulating a research proposal is a process which takes as much time and effort as the research itself, and as shown in this paper, involves all the key principles of research process.

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