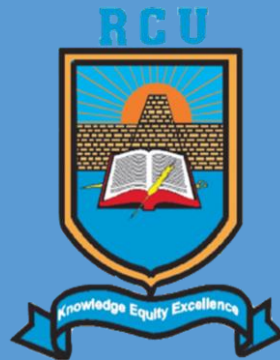

REFORMED CHURCH UNIVERSITY



Research Fundamentals

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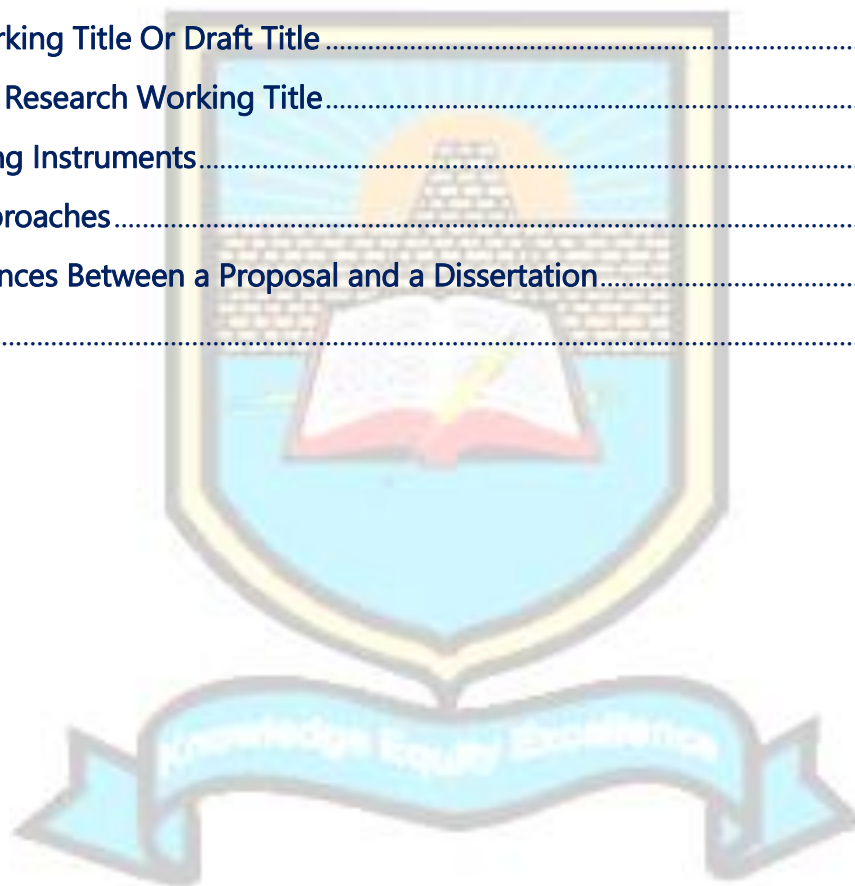
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Preamble

All buildings we envy today due to their beauty and durability are a product of a competent and qualified architectural designer who crafted a comprehensive building plan. To this end, while success of a builder is to a plan, success of a researcher is to a research proposal hence a research proposal is equivalent to a building plan. Thus, the starting point of a researcher is a paradigm shift in roles from being a mere researcher to becoming a competent designer of a comprehensive research proposal.

Research Proposal

A research proposal is a manuscript or document that proposes a particular research project with the intention to get funding from an organisation by scholarly addressing a range of issues centred on a proposed research topic:

- A research question(s) that the proposed research seeks to answer
- The methods that will be used to answer the sub-questions
- The prior research in the field (background)
- Potential benefits for the sponsoring institution
- The time and financial costs for the research (Creswell, 2014)

15 Key Elements of a Research Proposal

Research proposals are usually required when one plans to write a thesis, dissertation, or research paper and its structure is more similar to that of a research paper which constitutes the following 15 key pointers (Kumar, 2011; Yin, 2012; Creswell, 2014):

1. Introduction/background of the study
2. Problem statement,
3. Main research question
4. Sub-research questions
5. Research objectives
6. Hypothesis/assumptions
7. Significance of the study
8. Related literature review



9. Methodology [approach (procedures for research), design (procedures of inquiry), data gathering instruments, population, sample, sampling technique, data analysis technique etc.]
10. Limitations
11. Delimitations
12. Ethical issues [permission, confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, ascent, protection from harm, honesty with professional colleagues]
13. Trustworthiness [transferability, credibility, dependability, confirmability]
14. Definition of terms (define terms that individuals outside the field of study may not understand and that go beyond common language (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2013). Clearly, whether a term should be defined is a matter of judgment (Creswell, 2014) and,
15. Study framework [chapters outline]

Once these issues are properly designed and approved by the supervisor, dissertation writing is made easy as most of the critical aspects will have been covered already. For instance,

Chapter 1 will constitute items:

- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, and 15 above.

Chapter 2:

- 8

Chapter 3:

- 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13.

Essence of a Research Proposal

The proposal serves as a guide or yardstick that provides a framework within which the researcher operates so as to achieve set objectives.

Research Topic

- ✓ A research topic is often confused for a research working title.
- ✓ It is the subject matter of a proposed study,
- ✓ Is often written in a short phrase and



- ✓ Is the central idea to learn about or to explore (Creswell, 2014) such as:
- "natural pandemics;
 - faculty teaching,
 - national governance,
 - self-efficacy,
 - organisational creativity, etc.

Research Working Title Or Draft Title

It is a concrete idea that the researcher can keep refocusing on and changing as the project goes on (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) written in response to the question: What is my research about?

For instance:

"My study is about at-risk children in the junior high," or

"My study is about helping college faculty become better researchers."

It is this working title that can then be finally perfected during the course of the research or just before submission as determined by the study processes and findings. Creswell (2014:58) advises that, researchers can then consider how the working title might be expanded later to be more descriptive of one's study.

Wilkinson (1991) quoted in Creswell (2014) has this to say about a good draft title:

- Be brief
- avoid wasting words
- eliminate unnecessary words, such as "An Approach to ...," "A Study of ...," "an examination of.....," "An investigation about....."and so forth.
- Use a single title or
- a double title such as: "An Ethnography: Understanding a Child's Perception of War." Or
- "e-Learning in the COVID 19 era: Multiple-case study."



Qualities of a Research Working Title

- ✓ A research working title should manifest and demonstrate these qualities:
- ✓ Novel-new, original or unusual
- ✓ Ethical-does not cause harm or conflict of interest
- ✓ Worthwhile-valuable or useful
- ✓ Manageable-feasible and achievable
- ✓ Researchable-of researcher's subject of interest
- ✓ Has both theoretical and practical significance-relevant and addressing contemporary societal issues
- ✓ Precise-focused, meaningful (for easy construction of objectives), unambiguous (unmistakable and explicit), single interpretation
- ✓ Catchy-attractive and interesting-appetizing
- ✓ Simple-for readers' understanding
- ✓ No abbreviations
- ✓ Not in capital letters

Data Gathering Instruments

Since compiling dissertation chapters is through reporting what one would have encountered during field work, it is apparent that, drafting and approval of data gathering instruments such as:

- interview guides,
- questionnaires,
- focus group discussions,
- observation checklists etc

should follow soon after approval of a research proposal. (Yin, 2011; Ansari, 2011; Creswell, 2012)

Research Approaches

However, it is critical to mention that, data gathering instruments are determined by the type of a research approach one adopts. Research approaches include:



- qualitative [for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. 'Qualitative' means the search for meanings (Vohra, 2014:55) instead of
- quantitative [for testing and examining the relationship among variables. 'Quantitative' means experimentation or search for quantities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:10).] and
- mixed methods [for collecting and integrating both quantitative and qualitative data so that their combination provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone.] (Creswell, 2014:32).

Major Differences Between a Proposal and a Dissertation

Are that:

- while the former is a compilation of future things to happen, the later is a report of fieldwork experiences that the researcher encountered.
- The proposal is thus presented in FUTURE TENSE while the dissertation is presented in the PAST TENSE.

YES, Chapter demands may vary in terms of expressing issues, but the report is never in the FUTURE TENSE.

Instructions For Compiling The Final Report

- ✓ Standard font for the whole report is size 12.
- ✓ All Chapter headings should be centred and capitalised. The chapters should be numbered in Arabic format e.g. 1 or 2.
- ✓ Sub headings within the chapters should use the title case format.
- ✓ Tables and figures should be aligned to the left margin. Note that titles for tables are placed on top of the table whilst titles for figures are placed below the figure.
- ✓ The numbering for a table or figure should be prefixed by the chapter number and in chronological order within the chapter, e.g. Table 4.1 if it is the first table in Chapter 4.



- ✓ The authorisation letter must be inserted as an appendix at the end of the report. It should also be indicated in the table of contents under the list of appendices. You must include the name of the organisation, e.g. Letter of authorisation from Masvingo City Council.
- ✓ The length of the final report should be at least 50 pages but should not go above 100 pages.
- ✓ All sources used must be posted to the end of the report as one Bibliography. Note that citation guidelines are provided separately from the Department. The secretary will be at your service should a you need a copy.





References

1. Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research design* (4th Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
2. Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. 2011. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
3. Locke, L. F., Spirduso, W. W., & Silverman, S. J. (2013). *Proposals that work: A guide for planning dissertations and grant proposals* (6th ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
4. Vohra, V. (2014). Using the multiple case study design to decipher contextual leadership behaviour in Indian organisations. *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 12(1): 54-65.

