PROPOSAL DEFENSE MECHANISM FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS:
WRITING AN EFFECTIVE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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RESEARCH PROBLEM

‘A well defined and a structured research problem is the heart of the research project’
RESEARCH GAP

- Gaps in the research where you can suggest ways forward or theories of your own.
- Areas where the research is incomplete.
RESEARCH GAP

Identifying gaps in the literature shows that you understand the topic and suggesting new work, shows you have the potential for further study and independent research.
HOW TO BUILD RESEARCH PROBLEM & GAP?

Identify a ‘Practical Problem’

e.g.:

‘Let’s take the example of Safe Driving Habits in Sri Lanka. This is because, some drivers consume liquor before driving, they don’t know how to park even though a separate parking slot has been given, they use to throw trash out of the car window, some do not obey driving rules, traffic lights etc.’

* Having a puzzle you can simply convert the scenario into a research problem
Form a ‘Research Gap’
(now you need to have ‘practical problem’ and contradiction in literature’)

*e.g.: “Current global economic crisis seems to be especially hard for large companies. Therefore, SMEs are facing strong expectations for their role to be key players when economies will be recovering from the present global recession. Previous research has also widely investigated the firms' characteristics creating profitability. **However, the results obtained are inconclusive or even contradictory. Consequently, many researchers have concluded that more research is needed in that area**” (Soininen et al., 2012, p. 614)

* inconclusive or even contradictory with regard to the characteristics creating profitability in SMEs*
Another example of problem statement

One process, however, that has been neglected in second language research is that of vocabulary building (Carter, 1987; Levenston, 1979; Meara, 1980, 1983). It is true that a number of significant studies have recently been done on how second language learners infer word meanings from context (Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson, 1984), but the question of how those inferences help towards building up a native-like vocabulary has rarely been considered. Consequently, we have little basis, other than our own experience of what works, from which to develop an approach to the teaching and learning of words.
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES/QUESTIONS

1. Is the research question something I/others care about? Is it arguable?
2. Is the research question a new spin on an old idea, or does it solve a problem?
3. Is it too broad or too narrow?
4. Is the research question researchable within the given time frame and location?
LITERATURE REVIEW

- Extensive reference to related research and theory in your field

- It is where you identify the theories and previous research (which have influenced your choice of research topic and the methodology you are choosing to adopt)
PURPOSES OF DOING LR

- Identify the field and context of your research
- Identify the approach to the research and the methodology
- Identify types of data needed
- Gain a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of the field
- Avoid duplicating previous work (ensure the originality of your work – an essential prerequisite for PhD research!)
IDENTIFYING THEORIES, TERMINOLOGY, CONCEPTS, POLICY AND METHODOLOGY

EXPLORING IDEAS AROUND THE TOPIC

LOCATING PREVIOUS RESEARCH IN THE AREA

DEVELOPING CATEGORIES & THEMES FOR THE READING

SPECIFYING TITLE AND SECTION HEADINGS FOR THE LR

WRITING AND REVISITING DRAFTS OF YOUR REVIEW

DEVELOPING ARGUMENT: IDENTIFYING SOURCE TEXTS TO SUPPORT EACH STEP IN YOUR ARGUMENT

FORMULATING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

NOTE TAKING, SUMMARIES, INFORMAL WRITING

JUSTIFYING RESEARCH PROBLEM OR ISSUE TO BE INVESTIGATED

THE LITERATURE REVIEW PROCESS
A ‘good’ literature review is a synthesis of available research, is a critical evaluation, has appropriate breadth and depth, has clarity and conciseness, uses rigorous and consistent methods.

A ‘poor’ literature review is an annotated bibliography, confined to description, narrow and shallow, confusing and longwinded, constructed in an arbitrary way.
METHODOLOGY
METHODOLOGY

Considerations prior to identifying research methodology:

Your epistemological stance

Type of data to answer your research questions
EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANCE

An epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline.
POSITIVISM

• Advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social sciences
• The purpose of theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested and that will allow explanations of laws to be assessed (deductivism)
INTERPRETIVISM

- Emphasize on the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order (respect the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action)
- Multiple realities – what true for you might not be true to others
COMMON CONTRASTS BETWEEN QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE RESEARCH (Bryman, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>Words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Points of view of researcher</td>
<td>Points of view of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher distant</td>
<td>Researcher close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory testing</td>
<td>Theory emergent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured</td>
<td>Unstructured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td>Contextual understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard, reliable data</td>
<td>Rich, deep data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>Micro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artificial settings</td>
<td>Natural settings</td>
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(Bryman, 2004)
### CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

(Merriam, 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point of comparison</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus of research</td>
<td>Quality (nature, essence)</td>
<td>Quantity (how much, how many)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical roots</td>
<td>Phenomenology, interpretivism</td>
<td>Positivism, objectivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated phrases</td>
<td>Fieldwork, ethnographic, naturalistic, grounded, constructivist</td>
<td>Experimental, empirical, statistical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal of investigation</td>
<td>Understanding, description, discovery, meaning</td>
<td>Prediction, control, description, hypothesis testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design characteristics</td>
<td>Flexible, emergent, evolving</td>
<td>Predetermined, structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>Small, non-random, purposeful</td>
<td>Large, random, representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Researcher as primary instrument, interviews, observations, documents</td>
<td>Inanimate instruments (scales, tests, surveys, questionnaires)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode of analysis</td>
<td>Inductive (by researcher)</td>
<td>Deductive (by statistical methods)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Comprehensive, holistic, expansive, richly descriptive</td>
<td>Precise, numerical</td>
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RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

- Participants are determined by your research method.

- In quantitative research – you need a certain number of sample that are representative of the population.

- In qualitative research – no certain number of participants are required

  * saturation of data
RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

- Questionnaire
- Interview
- Observation
- Documents
- Etc
QUESTIONS TO GUIDE PROPOSAL DEFENSE:

1. What is the problem you are studying?
2. Why is it important?
3. What results have you achieved so far and why do they matter?
4. How is this substantially different from prior work?
5. What do you need to do to complete your work?
REMEMBER SMART

S pecific
M easurable
A chievable
R ealistic
T ime-Bound