

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

GUIDELINES TO DISSERTATION WRITING

Chapter 1: Title

What should a title Fulfill?

- Key word in the title should be key variables intended for study.
- Must be descriptive: cover purpose, place, time etc
cover scope and content of study as well as the the objectives

Chapter 2: Abstract

This should be brief summary of the body of the proposal. It should state why this study is necessary and important. The research questions/objectives to be addressed and the expected benefits. It should state the population targeted for the study, the design of the study and how the data will be collected, analyzed and reported.

Chapter 1:0 Introduction

(What should be included here?)

Introduction:

- Tells what the study will be about
 - Touches on key variables of the study
 - How the chapter is arranged in terms of sections

Background

Background to the proposed study- provides situational issues related to the intended study. Evidence on ground necessitating urgency for confronting the problem. Problem from global – regional – national - local situation. Theoretical and conceptual background, including rationale of the study.

Statement of the Problem

Could be covered in 2-3 paragraphs not exceeding one page

Describe clearly what the problem is that is going to be investigated. Demonstrate the gaps or deficits in knowledge or targets or other issues.

What is the nature of the problem and what is its magnitude in terms of its effects/consequences of not attending to it. What have researchers/workers done to address this problem and yet no solution. Indicate why the problem is really researchable, its theoretical and practical significance.

Objectives (or Purpose of the Study)

- A general objective specifying in a broad manner of intended achievements by carrying out the study.
- Objectives must be concise, focused, clear and specific on what the study intends to achieve.
- Ideally, each specific objective should cover one study variable or both the independent and dependent variable in a concise manner.
- Specific objectives should cover major parts of conceptual framework
- Are the objectives likely to measure what the problem is?
- Are objectives directly linked to the title?
Specific objectives must be "SMART" i.e specific, measurable, achievable(attainable), realistic and time bound

Research questions

- These are questions inter-linked to specific objectives which are to be answered by the researcher.
- It is a research purpose stated in a question form.
- A research question should contain both a "stem" and a "topic" e.g "Why "are Ugandan Women" not delivering in Health Centers?" "Why" is the stem, "not delivering in Health Centers is the topic.

NB: Research questions influence the choice of study design.

Hypothesis

A good hypothesis is clear, specific, testable and value-free

Note that not all proposed studies go with hypothesis. Hypotheses are usually limited to analytical and experimental study designs, for example, there can be no hypotheses in exploratory studies because there are no known variables that would relate to each other to predict an outcome.

A hypothesis predicts the nature of a relationship between an independent and dependent variable, the relationship could be between two or more variables. A hypothesis attempts to predict an answer to a research question in quantitatively oriented studies particularly analytical studies both research questions and hypotheses should be given. Hypotheses must be stated in such a way that they can be testable because at the end of the day, they will be acceptable or rejected.

Hypotheses must not make absolute prediction because in that case they cannot be testable e.g, Drug X is very effecacious.

Hypotheses must be warded in simple and concise terms; must show variables to be tested, predict outcome to the hypothesis, and must relate to the research problem.

NB: Exploratory and descriptive studies do not require a hypothesis because they describe how variables are distributed and not how they are related.

Hypotheses should predict a relationship between a presumed case and presumed outcome, and in that sense give direction to the proposed study.

Significance of the Study

State why this is important in terms of academic contribution, contribution to solving practical problems, influencing public policy, in adopting new medico-surgical procedures or what impact would it have in society or groups of people. What do people stand to gain from your study?

Conceptual framework (should follow hypothesis)

Conceptual frameworks use concepts as building blocks. This should indicate relationships between various variables in a form cause and effect relationship and therefore will indicate independent and dependent variables. The framework should be diagrammatically present followed by an abridged explanatory text.

NB: Not all studies need a conceptual framework; the obvious exceptions are exploratory and descriptive studies.

Operational definitions.

- Define her key issues or concepts that might be unique or that might be used to measure some aspect of the study. These are not derived from dictionaries, usually stated as follow: For purpose of this 'X' will be taken to mean

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

This is where the researcher has to show that he/she is on the top of the area of study. He should cover all controversial issues and put them in the context of his study area. So contributions of various researches are covered here and must be relevant to his/her focused area of study. He will demonstrate gaps and omissions in the existing body of knowledge in terms of current theories, applications and this should supplement the problem statement on why this area deserves and to be studied further.

The researcher should endeavor to address all the specific objectives in the literature search

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

States what sections are dealt with in this chapter and their arrangement.

Study design

This describes the structural arrangement of the study and how the stated arrangement will form the basis of the study. It is the equivalent of the architectural design in building houses. The design will among other things depend on the type of research question, hypothesis to be tested, nature of the problem and data that would be collected, and how often. For example data to be collected at one point in time would be cross sectional, but if it was to be collected on a number of occasions on same subjects, it would be prospective, among others.

The researcher must justify his/her design and in particular the study strategy e.g qualitative or quantitative or both.

Study Population

This is a target population from which a sample with definitive features will be selected e.g HIV/AIDS patients attending IHK Out Patient Clinic.

A sample could be those with a particular CD4 Count and who have been on ARVs for a specified time.

Sample size Calculation

Use specific formula that fits with the study design. Formulas for survey will not work for case control studies nor for Cohort studies because certain variables are catered for in different formulas.

Sampling procedures

Describe in detail what type of sampling procedures will be used (probabilistic or non probabilistic sampling). This describes in detail how the final respondents or study elements will be selected.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria could appear as independent section or could appear here.

Sources of data

This should be described because the type of data collection techniques will depend on this.

Study variables

These should be listed, in particular the dependent and independent variables. These will guide development of study tools later in the process.

Data Collection techniques/Methods

These are different approaches of data collection and also guided by research questions/objectives, type of study design and research hypothesis.

These could be face-to-face interviews, Key informant interview, Focus group discussions, questionnaires, Observation check list among others.

Data Collection tools

These are essential components of any study. These must have certain values and written in a systematic way. They must address both the specific objective and research questions. They must be developed in such way that they will elicit objective answers to the research questions. They must have face validity and other types of validity. Each question in the tools should ideally address one issue.

Plan for data analysis

The researcher demonstrates the various levels of analysis he/she intends to carry out. He/she could use tables/charts, chi-squares, t-tests among others to show the planned analysis. These should address the research questions/objectives, and the hypothesis. He/she should describe how descriptive statistics would feed into bivariate and multivariate analysis in case of quantitative data. For qualitative data, an effort should be made to describe how the data will be analyzed and used to support quantitative findings where applicable.

Quality Control Issues

These are measures taken to assure quality and validity of findings and should cover pre-testing of tools, training of research assistants, standardization of the instruments, and interpretation of results among others.

Ethical Issues

These should be covered here and should include rights of respondents, study subjects, Institutional clearances, etc

Budget

This is essential and should be itemized and given by unit costs and total cost where there is doubt on any item, justify the budget.

Work plan and Time frame

This sets out the time frame of the study and states who will be responsible for what activity

References

The University still favors HARVARD system of referencing and so every stake holder must get used to this until otherwise indicated.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation, analysis and interpretation

Presentation of results should be clear, logical and well organized. These could be organized by objectives or research questions

Tables must have clear understandable headings which should speak for themselves and so should be the contents of the tables or charts or graphs whatever the case.

Specific analytical models used should be self explanatory. The interpretations of the statistical or other findings should be clearly stated and how logical conclusions come out should also be clear to an informed reader. These conclusions should ideally address the specific objectives/research questions

It is in this chapter that the researcher should indeed show how the findings have addressed the research questions he/she set to answer in the study.

The presentation of results should be coherent and flow logically.

In presentation of results, the researcher should account for all the study subjects constituting the sample size. He/she must therefore be careful that columns and rows do tally and add to expected sample size or sub-groups like in Stratification analysis. In other words, he/she must ensure accuracy of data at all stages. If there is a missing value or variable, it must be accounted for.

Appropriate statistical analysis, appropriate to the nature of data should be strictly observed. The reporting of qualitative data in form of quotes or texts should be appropriately presented in support of specific quantitative findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Under this section, the student should discuss his/her own findings including the methodological process. An attempt should be made rather forcefully to relate the findings to those of other researchers in his/her area of study. In the course of such discussion, he/she should explain disagreements and agreements.

He/she should summarize his/her findings, discuss them and could give his/her own informed opinion.

He/she should comment on practical applications of the findings and go ahead to discuss implications of the findings in terms of policy issues, new medico-surgical approaches, old theories, and could indeed go a head and propose a new theory where applicable.

He/she should openly and honestly discuss the limitation of his/her study findings.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions and the recommendations must be seen to come out of the study process not outside of the study. (NB. Students have a tendency of borrow ship conclusions and recommendations from elsewhere in related areas, and this should strictly be avoided)

The recommendations must be actionable, and not flat or theoretical recommendations. Better still, if a proposal of how to implement the recommendations is done.

References of the Havard system will follow this chapter, then appendices.