



## **SUGGESTED STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

- Title
- The Objective
- Conceptual Context
- Literature Review leading to identification of the Research problem
- Main Research Question or Hypothesis  
(please select either of the two as appropriate to the proposed research)
- Research Design
- Ethical considerations
- References

### **Strictly advised to avoid the following in writing the proposal**

1. Please avoid giving chapterization of the thesis in the proposal. It is premature to attempt chapterization at this stage.
2. Avoid using hypothesis and research questions together. Use hypothesis only and only when you are trying to prove or disprove the causal relationship between two variables through an analysis of empirical or logical sources of argument.
3. As advised below, please do not resort to annotated bibliography and present the same as review of literature.
4. Avoid legal or policy intervention as research idea. A PhD proposal is attempting to articulate a researchable question with a view to explain something new about an issue or event or phenomenon. Focus on that.

### **Explanations:**

#### **Title**

- The title of the thesis should be informative and clear.
- It should indicate the primary focus of the proposed research.
- It should avoid being either too specific/technical or too general.

## Research Objective/s

- Research objective/s (or aim/s) of the thesis should be about be stated in a couple of paragraphs in which the scholar is expected to indicate what the proposed Ph.D. thesis is aimed to achieve. Ordinarily this part is where the scholar informs the reader about the primary issue of the study in few lines and its larger theoretical or knowledge significance within the chosen domain of research.

## Conceptual Context

- Conceptual context is where the scholar will connect the chosen issue (doctrinal or empirical or philosophical etc.) with a body of research work and indicate what kind of theoretical and conceptual questions need to be understood or explained in order to conduct the study meaningfully.
  - The scholar is therefore expected in this section to introduce and contextualize the 'general research area'. Such contextualization is to provide the researcher an opportunity to link a specific social or legal problem to a body of socio-legal theory. Such a link will further help the researcher to identify more focused set of readings for conducting the **review of literature**.
  - Please note that this section is neither a discussion of your specific research question nor a review of the relevant literature. Those components are dealt with in the subsequent section.

## Review of Literature leading to identification of the Research problem

- First of all, a word of basic clarification from the experience of previous years. Review of literature is not 'annotated bibliography'---bringing a set of readings together and providing their short summaries against each title is **not** review of literature. The purpose of review of literature is to make the researcher identify the key contributors, not just directly on the theme the researcher is proposing to study, but on the larger theoretical body of literature in which the issue is being located (the conceptual context mentioned above), and 'review' the key contemporary debates and identify the **gaps** or **unsettled controversies** or interesting issues on which some meaningful '**rethinking**' is desirable. The 'research problem' is to be framed based on those identified gaps etc., mentioned as the intended ambition of the researcher's contribution to the body of knowledge.
- Thus, in conceptualizing the **research problem** (and also subsequently deriving the **research question** or a **hypothesis** based on the research problem) the researcher would need to go through a process of clarifying and limiting the study focus. Ordinarily, such a process starts with a broad general research idea and taking into consideration the resources available to the researcher and other constraints (e.g. time, access to material and/or subject, research skills, language barriers, personal safety, ethical considerations, etc.), then refining this broad idea into a manageable issue for a viable research project.

- The researcher is strongly encouraged to make special effort in clearly defining all the key concepts and ideas that he/she/they refer to in plain language.
- If the first part of the review of literature helped the researcher to inform the reader about the researcher's familiarity with the conceptual context and the larger debates, the second part of the review of literature begins once the statement of the research problem is done. Here, the researcher will make the reader aware of the extent of her/his familiarity with the literature on specific nuances around the statement of the problem.
- Generally speaking, in reviewing the literature, the researcher is expected to cite other related studies, compare findings, highlight the limitations of this research, integrate the relevant theory and show the connection between this wider literature and your specific research problem. In short, review of literature is abstracting and synthesizing relevant ideas that inform researcher's focus of the study.

### **Research Design**

- Providing general guidelines for writing the methodology issues is always difficult. So the points presented here are to be seen as broad suggestions which necessarily need adaptation and modification as per the requirements of each study.
- At the highest level, the researcher must make an assessment of the kind of data/evidence the study requires and then make choice between the following options:
  - i) qualitative methods (including the doctrinal method);
  - ii) quantitative methods; and,
  - iii) mixed methods.
- This choice will determine the kind of analytical tools, data collection techniques etc. the study will embrace. This choice also influences the levels of generalizability of the findings of the study. In order to do it meaningfully, the researcher must familiarize oneself with the basic details of these methods.
- It is important that the rationale of the selection between the three kinds of methods be elaborated upon sufficiently in the proposal. This will tell the reader the extent of the researcher's familiarity with the nature of research problem and the appropriateness of the methods selected.
- In case of quantitative methods, the researcher should outline the hypothesis; research design; appropriateness of the sampling method/s; measuring instruments; data collection procedures; and data analysis techniques etc.

- Similarly, for qualitative and/or mixed methods, the careful linking of the research problem and questions on the one hand and the appropriateness of the method/s on the other is critically important. Why the researcher, for example, prefers a focus group discussion to an in-depth interviews, or a case study method to ethnography or any such choice needs careful reflection and justification.

### **Ethical considerations**

- This is not a mandatory section. But there is hardly any research study without any ethical dilemmas. How much should the research disclose to the respondent, whether the identity of the respondent is to be open or otherwise, what care one needs to take to represent the views of the respondents in one's own words, and many more are regular and inevitable dilemmas of any research study. It is thus important that the researcher make special effort in reflecting on these ethical issues and presents probable ways in which s/he will handle those conditions.

### **References**

- Providing references at the end is an important academic convention. It is therefore expected that the researcher will include a list of references, in alphabetical order, citing all books, articles, internet material, theses and other source material. An important aspect of the convention is to familiarize oneself with a chosen method of citation: please follow APA citation system.