

COMMON PROBLEMS IN PROPOSAL WRITING: EXPERIENCES OF MASTER OF EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Educational research is a critical, reflective and professional-oriented activity aimed at improving professional practice. It has a wide scope, ranging from the psychological, philosophical, sociological, economic, and political foundations of education to its application at the classroom level. No matter how big or how small a research is, it must delineate a significant contribution to existing knowledge. The research proposal is the first and the most important step in conducting a research study. It is a formal written plan which communicates ideas about a proposed study in order to obtain approval to conduct the study or to seek funding. The goal of a research proposal is to present and justify a research idea you have and to present the practical ways in which you think this research should be conducted. Further, the proposal offers a justification for the study, indicating why the research is worth doing and how it will be carried out.

Writing a research proposal prior to conducting a research study is an integral part of any post graduate study programme. The Department of Secondary and Tertiary Education, OUSL provides opportunities for teachers, principals, teacher educators and officers of education, through the conduct of a Master of Education programme, to earn a post-graduate qualification and to develop self-confidence towards designing, conducting and compiling research in their own fields.

The overall objective of this study was to investigate the critical problems faced by students in the M.Ed programme in writing and presenting their research proposals in order to strengthen the strategies adopted by the department to facilitate the process. Further, it aimed to explore the research areas and designs selected for research studies by the students, limitations in identifying a researchable problem and research design, formulating objectives, finding gaps in the literature and problems in compiling information pertaining to the background, rationale and significance of the research problems and designing methodology of the study. The sample of the study consisted forty eight students following the Master of Education programme in the Sinhala medium. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied for data collection and data analysis of the study.

Overall, there were good proposals submitted by the students though several problems emerged from the analysis of proposals and presentations. Lack of clarity in the overall titles/problems, the vague terms used in the research titles/problems, limited relevance of objectives to the title, objectives moving beyond the scope of the title and poorly worded objectives, limitations in the background of the study and literature reviews, incorrect explanations on

population, sample and sampling design and inadequacies in stating the limitations of the study were identified as problems related to the research proposals.

As recommendations, it is suggested that continuous meetings with the supervisors should take place prior to finalization of the proposals of the research studies. Further, hands-on-experience should be given during day school sessions related to the issues emerging from the study. Students should be thoroughly advised not to change their problems/research areas after receiving constructive feedback for their third assignment.

Keywords: Proposal Writing, Research Problem, Limitations of the Study

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