

# A Qualitative Study on Challenges that Post- Graduate Students Face in Research Proposal Writing at University Level

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## Abstract

Students face many challenges and obstacles during their research work and proposal writing is itself a challenge. The main purpose of the study is to highlight those challenges and to make recommendations that how to overcome these challenges. The research design of the study is qualitative. The population of the study is postgraduate level students. The sampling techniques used in the study is purposive non random sampling. The sample has been taken from the Mphil scholars of 4 Universities ; University of Karachi, Sindh Madrasatul Islam University, Iqra University and Agha Khan University. The sampling size of the study is 10 students of Mphil Level. The data is collected through interview method. The data is analyzed by using thematic analysis. The overall results of the study indicate that students face several challenges when they write their research proposals at post graduate level In which some major Challenges are selecting a research topic, understanding with the research supervisor, lack of guidance, lack of knowledge about research methodology, Lack of knowledge about appropriate paraphrasing techniques and avoiding plagiarism etc.

**Keywords:** Challenges; Post- Graduate; Research Proposal; University.

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## **1. Introduction**

Research is a critical and challenging task. It requires in depth knowledge of the subject matter, planning, care, and hard work. Writing a research proposal is the most integral part of post – graduate research writing. Proposal writing is the most important and the challenging part of the research. Students face many challenges while writing a proposal before moving towards the challenges we should know what is research proposal. The research proposal may be a document created with the intention of convincing an opportunity that the scientific research being proposed by the candidate is worth it which must also specialize in candidate's capability to successfully execute the project by outlining the clear research plan to achieve set goals [6].

### ***1.1 What is research proposal***

A research proposal is document written by a researcher that gives an in depth description of the proposed idea of research. It is an overview of the whole research process that provides a reader a summary of the knowledge discussed during a project. Preparation of research proposal is required because it facilitates numerous research operations, thereby making research as efficient as possible yielding maximal information with minimal expenditure of effort, time and money. In fact the research proposal is that the conceptual structure within which research is conducted; it constitutes the blueprint for the gathering , measurement and analysis of knowledge. As such the proposal includes an outline of what the researcher will do from writing the hypothesis and its operational implications to the final analysis of data [7]. The details in a research proposal should be extremely relevant to the selected topic . As per previous studies the research proposals must have excellent quality and as long as the author has focused on the topic by qualitatively selecting citations to support the claims rather than quantitatively adding partial or fully irrelevant literature as in references; as of just to extend the word count of the document [3].

### ***1.2 Goal of writing a Research Proposal***

The goal of writing a research proposal is to justify a research idea you have choose and to present your research idea into sensible ways in which you want it to be conducted. Research proposals contains extensive literature reviews which help in knowing that there is a gap and the topic needs further research. Additionally research proposals have detailed research methodology according to the needs of professional and academic field. Research proposals also provide the knowledge about outcomes derived from the study [10].

### ***1.3 Previous Studies on the topic***

This section presents review literature related to the problems that post graduate level students face while research proposal writing and the mistakes they do while writing their proposals. Kikula and Quorro in Tanzania did a research on the same topic and in that 783 research proposals were submitted, in which titles were not specific in 71% of proposals, the introductions of 72% proposals were not clear, about 84% of the problem statements what is relevant and unobvious. Objectives of the study in 71%of the proposals were poorly formulated. literature review section in 86% of the proposals were not good enough and lack of focus found in literature review. about 73% of the proposals were unclear about the research methodology, 88 % percent of the

sampling procedures were not suitable for the study and in 89% of the proposals the data analysis section were omitted[8]. The selection of the topic is one of the most challenging and difficult part of research proposal writing. the topic should be Novel and not too wide, it should be specific [2]. REPOA (2007) point out some challenges and mistakes student in proposal writing and it was in Tanzania while they had evaluated the research proposals submitted for the funding. According to the report that there were mistakes in the construction of titles. There were excessive words used in the titles. Titles were not self explanatory. The introduction section in most of the proposals found unclear and inappropriate. When it comes to the statement of the problem only 16% of the statement were written in a proper manner or we can consider as a good statements. The rest of them were unsatisfactory. The other problems were related to the data analysis techniques. The instructions in the instruments of research usually unclear, questionnaire are too lengthy or sometimes researcher use fancy vocabulary which is not easily understandable for the respondent [1]. According to Paul Wong and Psych there are the following mistake that students do while writing a research proposal [11] :

- Improper construction of research question.
- Failure to narrow down their topic.
- Students usually right unnecessary details instead of writing material relevant to the topic.
- failure to follow the direction.
- Incorrect referencing.
- incorrect formatting.
- Unable to follow the APA style correctly.

Kombo and Tromp point out problems in the titles, that research titles were not specific , full of words and lack of consistency in the text was also found. Another problem found was that the background of the study was not well written. It was difficult to differentiate between background and the literature review of the study. Majority of the research proposal writers unable to define statement of the problem. When talking about literature review most of the proposal writers were not successful to relate the suitable literature with their proposed study [9]. Mhute (2013) stated that plagiarism is the most common mistake done by the students in proposal writing. He also advised that the work should be plagiarism free because it is unethical to use someone's work without giving them credit.

#### **1.4 Objectives**

1. To know the challenges that post- graduate level students face while writing a research proposal.
2. To identify that does the students consider topic selection as a biggest challenge.
3. To identify that choosing a research supervisor is also a challenge for the students.
4. To identify that how students face challenges in doing plagiarism free work.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. What are the challenges that post graduate level students face while writing a research proposal ?

2. How does choosing a research supervisor is a challenge for the student ?
3. How does finding a relevant literature is a challenge in proposal writing?

## **5. Materials and Methods**

The research design of the study is qualitative. The population of the study is postgraduate level students. The sampling techniques used in the study is purposive non random sampling. The sample has been taken from the Mphil scholars of 4 Universities ; University of Karachi, Sindh Madrasatul Islam University, Iqra University and Agha Khan University. The sampling size of the study is 10 students of Mphil Level. The data collection tool used in the study is an Interview. The data is analyzed by using thematic analysis.

## **6. Results**

The data is collected by taking 10 interviews from the Mphil scholars of 4 University. The overall analysis of interviews as follows :

- The most important challenge that students face while writing a research proposal is the selection of topic.
- Another important factor that is students consider as a challenge is choosing a research supervisor.
- Some of the students highlight that reaching towards the mental level of the research supervisor is one of the biggest challenge.
- Some research supervisors does not provide proper guidance to the students regarding the research procedures and they just ask students to work without giving any background knowledge which is also a challenge for the students at post graduate level.
- Construction of the appropriate research objectives is also challenge for the students of postgraduate level.
- Selecting a suitable methodology is also a challenge for some students.
- It is also difficult for some students to make their research plagiarism free which is also a challenge for the students.
- Another challenge that is students highlight in the interview is that there is no proper guidance that how to make their work plagiarism free and how to paraphrase properly in order to avoid plagiarism.

The overall results of the study indicate that students face several challenges when they write their research proposals at post graduate level In which some major Challenges are selecting a research topic, understanding with the research supervisor, lack of guidance, lack of knowledge about research methodology, Lack of knowledge about appropriate paraphrasing techniques and avoiding plagiarism etc.

## **7. Discussion**

In this study we identified that what are the challenges that his students face while writing a research proposal which is the 1st objective of the study, And after conducting a research we come to know that there are several

challenges that students face in research proposal writing in which the major challenges are topic selection, reaching towards the mental level of the research supervisor, selecting a research supervisor, constructing research objectives, choosing appropriate methodologies etc. The second objective of this study is that how does the students consider topic selection as a challenge and after the collection of data we identify that the topic selection is the biggest challenge for their students because sometimes their supervisors reject their topics multiple times due to the lack of innovation in the topic that is why students consider it has the biggest challenge to find out the novel topic. The third objective of this study is that how does the students consider choosing a supervisor as a challenge and after the analysis of data we come to know that choosing a supervisor is the biggest challenge for the students, before selecting a supervisor the students should make sure that the particular supervisor is interested in the same area of research which you are going to. The 4th and the last objective of this study is that how students face challenge in doing plagiarism free work and we come to know that it is a big deal for the students to paraphrase their work properly in order to avoid plagiarism and it is a challenge for them because their supervisors does not teach them the proper techniques for avoiding the plagiarism.

## **8. Recommendation**

There are the following recommendations of the study to overcome the challenges that students face in proposal writing :

- There should be a proper provision of the resources for the research students in in the universities for example libraries full of literature ,digital libraries etc so that they can find relevant literature for their research study.
- Another recommendation is that the research supervisors should give proper time and guidance to their students so that they can work smoothly without confusions.
- The students should be given to turn it in assess so that they can check their plagiarism time to time.

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