

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Introduction

[The introduction includes an overview of the purpose and focus of the study. It should start with a purpose statement (e.g., “The purpose of this study is to examine the problem of practice found in the anxiety levels of online doctoral students throughout their course of study”). Why is the study significant? How you hope it will contribute to the field of practice.]

Problem Statement

[State the problem of practice and briefly why you find this to be a problem (e.g., “The problem of practice of online doctoral students’ anxiety levels during course seems work impede their success in moving through the program in the timely manner that is desired”). Further your explanation with subsections that deal with each of the dimension of your problem of practice.]

Focus on Instructional and/or Systemic Issues

[Instructional or systemic issues are problems that involve the interactions of teachers, students, and content or the interactions of system leaders, schools, and communities that relate to school or system performance and/or community well-being.]

Is Directly Observable

[A problem of practice must be empirical in nature not theoretical. While theory may be used to assist in the examination of the problem, the problem itself must be directly observable.]

Is Actionable

[Actionable in the sense that the problem can be improved in real time. This dimension further defines the problem of practice as it extends the Directly Observable dimension; however, it is important to note all that not all problems that are directly observable are actionable from the standpoint of an educational leadership doctoral student.]

Connects to Broader Strategy of Improvement

[We see problems of practice having a reciprocal relationship with broader improvement plans. Improvement plans might very well assist in defining problems of practice, while the in-depth study of a particular problem may enable a school or system realize its stated goals.]

Is High Leverage

[Solving a problem of practice would make a significant difference for student learning and/or community health. Being high-leverage is related to being actionable. Ideally, we want students to make a difference in the field as a result of their obtaining a degree.]

Research Questions

[State your research questions. These should be directly tied to your purpose, and should be specific and clear. Qualitative questions should be ore open-ended while quantitative questions should be more hypothetical. These questions should cue the reader as to which direction (approach) you are taking in your study.]

Overview of Methodology

[This is a brief overview that outlines the methodological type or approach that you propose to take with your study. Keep in mind that you will be going into much greater detail in your Chapter 3. In this section, you should let your reader know what broad approach (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method) and a more specific methodology (e.g., case study, experimental, grounded theory, phenomenology, program evaluation, etc.). A brief description of how you are going to collect your data (data collection methods) and who you are going to collect information from (sources of data). These topics will then be revisited in Chapter 3 with a much more detailed description and justification.]

Positionality

[This section talks about you, the researcher and should include two sub-sections safter a brief definition of what you mean by “positionality.”]

Researcher's Role

[This sub-section should introduce you, the researcher to the reader in terms of your professional role, your relationship with the problem of practice, and what role as a researcher you will play.]

Assumptions

[This sub-section should inform the reader what assumptions and biases you bring to the study as both a researcher and a practitioner]

Definition of Key Terms

[This section presents a list of key terms and definitions that may or may not be known to the reader. In education, in general there is heavy use of acronyms and other terminology that are often be context specific. For example, RTI might be called something different in another state and your dissertation will be available to readers who might not be familiar with your context.

These need to be defined in this section as well as any unique terms that you feel needs to be identified and defined for the unique use in your study.]

Organization of the Dissertation

[This section provides an organizer for the reader so they know what to expect in the later chapter. Introduce each of the Chapters that are to follow and briefly describe what the reader can expect to find when they get to each chapter. For your proposal, you will introduce the next two chapter. For your actual dissertation, you will add the additional chapters.]

Tips:
A quality Chapter 1 situates the context and scope of the study and makes clear to the reader what problem of practice the study addresses, why this is a problem of practice, how the author is proposing to study/solve the problem of practice. After reading the first chapter, the reader should be able to articulate accurately what it is that you are proposing to do and why. A quality Chapter one can stand alone as a document in the sense that that reader can read only the first Chapter and have a good understanding of what the study is about. They (the reader) should not feel that they need to dig further into the dissertation to get this information. At the same time, your Chapter one should entice the reader to want to read further so they can learn more about the problem of practice and what you did in relation to it.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

[Reintroduce your study by starting with the same purpose statement that you used to begin Chapter 1 (e.g., “The purpose of this study is to examine the problem of practice found in the anxiety levels of online doctoral students throughout their course of study”). Explain to the reader how you went about searching for literature that informed your thinking about your problem of practice (e.g., identify search engines that you used, the search terms that you used, etc.). Basically, you want to give the reader a sense of how what you did to get familiar with your problem of practice.

Review of the Literature

[Introduce what is to follow by providing an organizer for the reader (e.g., “The following sections represent the topic areas that were explored to further understand the problem of online doctoral student anxiety: efficacy, isolationism, student/professor relationships, and resources.”) Each of these topic areas then becomes sub-headings.]

Efficacy (topic 1)

[Review the literature about topic 1. For the above example, this would be “efficacy” therefore the subheading “Efficacy.” End the subsection with a meaningful summary of that section – relate the topic back to your problem of practice]

Isolationism (topic 2)

[Review the literature about topic 1. For the above example, this would be “isolationism” therefore the subheading “Isolationism.” End the subsection with a meaningful summary of that section - relate the topic back to your problem of practice]

[...and so on for the rest of the areas that you included in your literature review. End each subsection with a meaningful summary]

Conceptual Framework

[Using the related literature that you reviewed above, any existing theories, and your own professional and personal experiences identify relationships that might exist between these three entities. Feel free to use figures to visually display relationships, etc.]

Chapter Summary

[Briefly synthesize the chapter and introduce Chapter 3]

Tips:

A quality Chapter 2 situates the problem of practice in the existing literature (literature review, possibly connects the problem of practice to existing theories, and provides a conceptual framework from which the researcher draws in conducting and completing the study. While the template suggests that this is not as lengthy as Chapters 1 or 3, it often is one of the longest chapters in the dissertation since one purpose of the literature review is to make as thorough review of the literature as possible and to show that the author (you) has become familiar with the existing scholarly literature and in particular the most current scholarly literature that has been published. The Chapter also provides the reader with the opportunity to identify the author as an expert not just on the literature, but on any existing theories that might inform the problem of practice and how the relationship between the existing literature/theories, personal experience and the actual problem of practice can be realized.

CHAPTER THREE – INQUIRY METHODS

Introduction

[Reintroduce your study by starting with the same purpose statement that you used to begin Chapters 1&2 (e.g., “The purpose of this study is to examine the problem of practice found in the anxiety levels of online doctoral students throughout their course of study”). Reintroduce your research approach/paradigm (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) along with your methodological approach (e.g., phenomenology, grounded theory, critical theory, program-oriented evaluation, experimental, process-oriented evaluation, outcome-oriented evaluation, etc.). Reintroduce your research questions to the reader. Describe the organization of Chapter 3.]

Rationale

[This section presents to the reader your rationale for the research paradigm that you are proposing to use and your rationale for the methodology that you are proposing. It is in this

section that you cover theoretical perspectives such as constructionism, positivism, or pragmatism, and so on as your theoretical perspective should inform your research approach and should be aligned with your research questions. For example, if I am examining the anxiety of online doctoral students and one of my questions asks what the anxiety level is of the typical online doctoral student (as if there were such a thing) I would offer to the reader that one theoretical perspective that informs the study is the positive perspective and explain why.

Problem Setting/Context

[In this section, you justify the setting (which you will rehash, to some extent, your problem of practice justification) and give a meaningful and informative description of the context of the problem of practice. For many, this will be your workplace. You should cover the background/history of things that pertain to the problem of practice. For some examples, how long the school has been in existence under the current administration, what is the academic history of the organization, what is the history of the program (if a program is part of the problem), the demographics of those who are involved in the problem, and so on.]

Research Sample and Data Sources

[Who were selected to participate, why, and what sampling strategy was used? Be sure to spend time on criteria if purposeful sampling will be used and the justification for those criteria. Potential ethical and political concerns with the proposed sample should be discussed, and a discussion on how you plan on protecting the sample/participants.]

Data Collection Methods

[This section will describe all the data collection tools and processes that you propose to use. Appendices should be provided of surveys, interview protocols, etc. if these tools are being proposed. For each data collection strategy, there should be a justification. These justifications should adequately link the data collection strategy back to your research questions.]

Data Analysis Methods

[How do you, as the researcher, propose you will analyze your data? Simple or factorial analysis of variables, open coding, multiple regression, frequency distribution, value coding, multiple-cycle coding, etc, etc, etc... Justify why you are proposing the analysis method(s) that you present. How do they help you answer your research question?]

Trustworthiness

[What are the threats to the validity of the study, and how do you propose to deal with these? What are the pre-emptive strategies that your study design proposes which will strengthen the credibility/validity of your study? The reader (particularly dissertation committees will look for credibility issues. Your job as the writer is to convince them that your proposed study is trustworthy and will most likely result in meaningful and useable results to confront your problem of practice.]

Limitations and Delimitations

[What external conditions might restrict the scope of your proposed study (limitations)? How does the design of the study restrict the potential scope of the study (delimitations)? It is always better to let the reader know upfront that you are aware of the imitations and delimitations of your study. Your goal is to impress upon the reader that you have been thoughtful and vigilant through the design phase of the study.]

Summary

[Summarize the chapter by talking about the overall methodological design of your study and how it is aligned with your research questions, your problem of practice, and your conceptual framework. Think deeply about how these components of your proposal relate and resonate with one another.]

Tips:
A quality chapter 3 convinces the reader that you, the researcher, understand the methodological approach that you are proposing. In addition, the reader sees clearly the connection between the various components within the methodology (e.g., theoretical framework, data collection, data analysis, etc.) and sees the clear connection between the problem of practice, the research questions and the proposed methodology. Lastly, the reader, after reading the three chapters knows what your problem of practice is, why it's a problem, what information already exists that informs the problem, what theories might be applied to the problem, what questions you have chosen to ask about the problem and how you are going to go about answering those questions, thus closing the gap between the desired state and the actual state that defines the problem.

Overall Tips:

- Remember, good writing is readable.
- Each problem of practice has its own unique qualities; therefore the above template might be tweaked. It is suggested; however, that the template itself be adhered to for the most part for your proposal. The adjustments might be made by adding subheadings to the existing headings where you might feel it helps organize your writing and adds to the clarity of your message.
- Yes, there is some slight redundancy built into the proposal and eventually your dissertation. Most of this redundancy is found in your introduction sections to each chapter. Think in terms of the reader who only wants to see what you have written about the related literature/conceptual framework to your study. They should be able to pick up your Chapter 2 and only read that portion and still know what the study is about.
- Visual cues can really assist the reader to understand what you might be trying to say in words. Therefore, look for places to use figures and tables. Regardless of the type of approach you propose, there will be places that figures that show the relationship between things that you are talking about can really help clarify your message.
- And, of course, use your APA manual!