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PROPOSAL AND THESIS WRITING: AN INTRODUCTION; DONALD KISULU KOMBO AND DELNO L. A. TROMP. PAULINES PUBLICATIONS AFRICA, NAIROBI KENYA, ISBN 9966-08-133-X. 168 PP

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ABSTRACT

This book on proposal and thesis writing was written by Donald Kisilu Kombo and Delno Tromp (2013) and published by Paulines Publications Africa. The book aims to address challenges related to students' ability to identify, define the research problem and provide guidelines for the preparation of scholarly research works among undergraduate and postgraduate students. The book comprises eight chapters and a superfluous conclusion chapter. This book addresses different themes guiding the process of developing research proposals and reports. The text is distinguished by the inclusion of a good number of local examples, illustrations and cases to give a clear understanding of key issues in social research methods. This book is very important for students and researchers who are interested in social science research methods. This review consists of a summary of the eight chapters and a critical discussion of key issues in the book. The review also makes an overall assessment of the contributions the book has made to the field of social science research methods.

Keywords: Research proposal, Thesis, Social science, Research methods

1.0 SYNOPSIS OF THE BOOK

The first chapter is a comprehensive introduction of the research proposal and thesis writing and the variables. It gives the main challenges which scholars are facing in writing research proposals and theses. It gives details of how such challenges lead to the researcher's failure to clearly and evidently delineate what is expected to be in a research proposal and or thesis. The authors explain the concept and components of research, types of research in form of qualitative and quantitative research. The chapter also clearly differentiated between a research proposal and a research thesis. The chapter discusses the essence of research topic selection, qualities of effective research topic, identification of keywords for the research topic and variables.

Chapter two of this book is on how to write the introduction. It composes the background for the proposed research. The role, structure, steps and qualities, and challenges in writing an effective background to the study are herein discussed (p.24-32). Kombo and Tromp (2013) have also explained how to write a statement of the problem in terms of its meaning, qualities, steps and challenges faced in articulating the research problem (p.32-36). The good thing, three sample backgrounds to the study and statements of the problems are given from studies by Kombo (2005), Murathe (2005), and Olombo (2005).

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The authors discuss the aims and objectives and hypotheses in terms of meaning, types, importance, qualities and ways of formulating them. This is cemented by samples from several studies done previously. The chapter eventually offers insights on research questions, significance of the study, limitations, theoretical and conceptual framework.

Chapter three describes the meaning, importance and qualities of an effective literature review. The guidelines and common challenges researchers face in formulating an effective literature review were also discussed as part of this very important part of a research proposal or thesis (p.62-69). Authors realise the relevance of the review of related literature and how existing research is significant to future research works. Chapter four describes the methods applied in carrying out the research study. It describes research design in terms of its meaning, types, qualities, guidelines, steps and pitfalls in selecting a research design. The chapter also captures details of the study area, population, sampling, instruments and data collection procedures.

Chapter five is on data collection, analysis and presentation. The authors show the relevance of up-to-date and comprehensive data on the population characteristics, commercial undertakings, government plans, economic perspectives, facilities and resource mobilisation. The chapter gives the concept of data collection, purpose, sources, considerations, steps, and ethical issues and challenges in data collection (p.99-109). Part two of this chapter embarks on data organisation, analysis and presentation. Authors view data analysis as an examination of data collected in a survey or experiment and making deductions and inferences (p.117). They considered methods of data analysis as they are influenced by the nature of data i.e. qualitative or quantitative. To them, qualitative data analysis takes three analytical techniques: (i) quick impressionist summary, (ii) thematic analysis and (iii) content analysis. Quantitative data analyses explained in this book are correlational analysis, prediction studies, causal-comparative research and experimental research.

Chapter six is on summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations. This section details the summary of the main findings, the conclusion drawn and recommendations made. The authors argue that while the summary of the key findings should clearly pinpoint if the objectives were achieved or not, the conclusion should state how the study has contributed to the body of knowledge. Further, they contend that the recommendations section should expose further problems and introduces more questions to be answered in the study area and how the study can be improved. Moreover, the recommendations are extrapolation of the key findings, thus it should show whether there are areas that deserve further investigation. The chapter winds up with three samples of summary, conclusions and recommendations from three different scholars.

In recognition of challenges that students and researchers face in scientific writings, authors in chapter seven give detailed descriptions of referencing. The chapter explains references in the body of the text, direct quotations, paraphrase, citation styles, the listing of references and presentation styles for journal articles, books, conference proceedings, dissertations, theses, research reports, company reports and personal communication. The naming of chapters, figures, tables, diagrams and equations was also described in this chapter. Finally, chapter eight winds up with appendices in way of preparing and presentation of budgets and work plans.

2.0 CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE OVERALL CONTRIBUTION

This book is very valuable because of its contribution to research proposals and research report writing. Social science research methods are rarely discussed within the research framework but this book is devoted to do so. This book is divided into eight chapters, with each chapter uses local examples and cases to illustrate basic issues in research methodology. The book covers most of the important components of research proposal development and thesis writing which are very important to researchers and students undertaking undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Indeed, the authors succeeded in discussing the key issues in the preparation of scholarly research papers that examine in detail issues and problems and provide solutions and recommendations to social problems facing the societies. The text has consequently been focusing on addressing these challenges and come up with guidelines for preparing research proposals and theses in a scholarly way. The book attempts to use several local examples and cases to give a clear illustration of key issues in research methods. Illustrations used are majorly from Kenya but have also been effectively used by students and scholars from within the East African region to support the teaching and learning of social science research. Despite these tremendous efforts done by the authors, some areas need to be improved to nourish this book. For instance, the text needs to include sections of checklist boxes, review, and discussion questions together with self-check questions and answers in each chapter. This will help the readers to assess their level of understanding of the concepts discussed in each chapter.

The methodology section is well written, however, there is a need for a section to negotiate access and research ethics. Authors should give details of what research ethics are and why researchers are required to adhere research ethics and act accordingly. Several key ethical issues arise across the stages and duration of the research project. Authors would have discussed ethical issues during formulating and clarifying research topics and when designing research. Data collection is a very critical stage where researchers and respondents most interact. At this stage, according to Saunders *et al.*, (2012) researchers need to consider: privacy of possible and actual participants, consent and possible deception of participants, the confidentiality of data provided by individual participants, voluntary participation and the right to withdraw partially or completely from the process, reactions of participants to the way a researcher seeks to collect data (e.g. embarrassment, stress, discomfort, pain and harm), effects on participation on the way researcher use, analyse and report data (e.g. avoidance of embarrassment, stress, discomfort, pain and harm), behaviour and objectivity of a researcher. Apart from ethical issues during data collection, another important section is to include ethical issues associated with data processing, storage, analysis and reporting.

The authors also did not discuss threats to validity and reliability and in this case, the common threats are subject error, time error and observer error (Saunders *et al.*, 2012) along with the common strategies for overcoming these threats. Moreover, a discussion on the types of tests for validity and reliability would have made a significant contribution to this book. Authors need to discuss the reliability tests such as test re-test method, parallel form technique, split-half method, internal consistency and alternative form (Mitchell, 1996). Often, when discussing the validity of a questionnaire, authors need to give details of tests like content validity, criterion-related (predictive) validity, construct validity, known group method, multipart-multi method, matrix method and factor analysis (Raju &Prabhu, 2011; Cooper & Schindler, 2011).

The book ignored the fact that research approach and research philosophy are the first two onion layers. It is of interest to this review to show the relevance of a clear understanding of research philosophies and approaches. Authors may include in their discussion the four core research philosophies: positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism. A discussion on the two research approaches i.e. deductive and inductive approach will signify this section of a book. Authors should also note that a question of research methods (i.e. qualitative or quantitative) is of secondary importance to questions of which paradigm to be used in a research study. Paradigms are very important ways that define the basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation in choosing the methods, ontologically and epistemologically.

There is no doubt that plagiarism is increasingly becoming an enormously important topic in academic institutions in recent years, largely attributed to the ease with which materials can be copied from the internet and accepted as the work of an individual student. Authors would have defined plagiarism, the common forms of plagiarism, how to test, strategies used to reduce similarity indices and some common sanctions for being found guilty of plagiarism. The inclusion of modern software that is used to test the similarity index together with how they are used will make a valuable input to this book.

3.0 CONCLUSION

Despite being published over a decade, the book by Kombo and Tromp is still valid and a good resource book for researchers, university students and lecturers majoring in social sciences and policymakers. The major weakness of this book is its failure to take account of checklist boxes, review and discussion questions together with self-check questions and answers which promises continuity and strengthened flow of concepts and ideas covered in each particular chapter. The inclusion of practical Kenyan cases is important to readers especially students, young researchers and scholars in developing countries like Tanzania.

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