WRITING YOUR THESIS

(A Practical Guide for Students)

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PART I

Writing Your Thesis Proposal

Chapter 1
The Meaning of Research

Definition of Research

Research is defined as the "careful, diligent, and exhaustive investigation of a specific matter, having as its aim the advancement of mankind's knowledge" (Manheim, 1977). What is definitely implied in this definition, and which is a basic assumption of any research, is that knowledge is desirable and is preferable to ignorance. More recently, Brew (2001) observed that many definitions of research include the following features (p.21):

1. It is "finding out something and making it public."
2. It is providing a "means of generating, testing and validating knowledge."
3. It is a "systematic process of investigation, the general purposes of which is to contribute to the body of knowledge that shapes and guides academic and/or practice disciplines" (cited from Powers and Knapp, 1995).
4. It is "about advancing knowledge and understanding" (cited from Oliver, 1997:3).

> you believe in exists. Subjective belief, in other words, must be checked against objective reality. You must always subject your notions to empirical inquiry and test.

It should be pointed out, however, that today there is much less effort in distinguishing between what previously may have been referred to as scientific and non-scientific research. In fact, researchers are agreed that research, whether in the natural or social sciences, do employ rigorous methodologies which is what make them scientific in the first place.

Types of Research

Purposive nomenclature of research

The categorization of research based on what is referred to here as the purposive nomenclature is based on the basic aim of the research. In the past, there were three categories under purposive nomenclature, namely: fundamental (or pure or basic) research, applied research, and action research.

Kumar (2005), however, reports that a recent orientation in the classification of research is the dichotomy between "applications" or "objectives" perspectives on one hand, and "inquiry mode employed" on the other. The general classification labled "application research" includes under it two subclasses called pure research and applied research.

Research according to application or objectives. As Kumar (2005) points out, this classification includes what we used to discuss separately: fundamental (or pure or basic) research and applied research.

1. *Fundamental or pure research.* From the natural sciences view point, one may say that the purpose of research is the development of theories by discovering broad generalizations or principles. It employs careful sampling procedures in order to extend, by inference, the findings beyond the group or situation studied. It has little concern for application of findings to actual problems in areas considered to be the concern of people other than the investigator. We can say that pure research, which is also called basic research at times, is undertaken to satisfy the curiosity of the researcher or scientist. It is usually carried out in the laboratory. In the behavioral sciences, this type of research has been primarily the activity of clinical psychologists, using animals as subjects. We might emphasize here that laboratory research on humans is considered unethical. Kumar (2005) observes that "pure research involves developing and testing theories and hypotheses that are intellectually challenging to the researcher but may or may not have practical application at the present time or in the future" (p.6).

2. *Applied research.* It has most of the characteristics of fundamental research, including the use of sampling techniques and the subsequent inferences about the target population. However, its purpose is to improve a product or a process – testing theoretical concepts in actual problem situations. Most research undertaken in the social sciences are applied research (Kumar, 2005). They include the following:

   2.1 Descriptive research refers to the systematic description of a situation, a problem, phenomenon, service or program, or information about a situation like living conditions in a particular community, or description of attitudes towards an issue. The catch word is "description" that can refer to the description of practically anything.

2.2 Correlational research establishes the existence of a relationship between or among variables of the study.

2.3 Explanatory research clarifies why and how there is a relationship between situations or phenomena.

2.4 Exploratory research explores an area that is little known, or to determine whether or not there are possibilities of undertaking further research in said area.

2.5 Feasibility study or pilot study may be undertaken to arrive at a decision as to whether or not a full-blown research on a specific topic or area is necessary or warranted.

Research according to the mode of inquiry. Kumar (2005) classifies under this what we have referred to in the past as "action research." This is focused on the immediate application of the findings of the research to the solution of an existing problem, not on the development of theory or upon general application. It puts emphasis on a problem, here and now, in a local setting. Its findings are to be evaluated in terms of universal validity, but its purpose is to improve practices, and at the same time, to improve those who try to improve the practices. From the point of view of education research, action research is the "systematic inquiry done to gather information about – and subsequently improve – the ways their particular education setting operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn" (Creswell, 2002). The means it aims to improve practice.