

Charting New Territories: A Foray into the Field of Exploratory Research to Understand Its Efficacy in Ensuring the Effectiveness of Research Proposal

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Abstract

This paper seeks to shed light on the symbiotic relationship of exploratory research and research proposal to unearth the impact of exploratory research in crafting compelling research proposals, and thereby, in navigating the unknown, charting the uncharted, and exploring the unexplored. A minute overview of exploratory research unveils its usefulness in ascertaining the validity, reliability, and acceptability of a research proposal. Exploratory research is usually carried out at an initiatory stage to pursue a problem that is not clearly defined. Also known as phenomenological research, such type of research concentrates on a new phenomenon and excavates new ideas and insight from it. With its non-probability sampling design, use of primary and secondary sources for collection of data, and flexible operational procedures, this low-cost and inconclusive research design assists a researcher by providing the substratum of a research proposal, the research problem, and evaluates its feasibility with a view to making it conspicuous at the initial stage, whether the problem is worth pursuing. With the objective of unraveling how exploratory research forms the very soul of a research proposal, this paper begins by providing a precise overview of research-its definition, types, and characteristics.

Keywords: Research, exploratory research, phenomenological research, mechanics of research proposal

Introduction

In the arena of research, a research proposal is of paramount importance as it helps in crafting the scope, objectives, and methodologies of research. Research is a systematic and assiduous search for pertinent information on a specific phenomenon. It's an expedition into the uncharted territories of the unknown. As defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, research is "a careful study of a subject, especially in order to discover new facts or information about it". It assembles one's inquisitiveness for knowledge and the methods that one employs for obtaining knowledge (Kothari and Garg 1). According to Clifford Woody, research comprises defining and redefining problems, formulating hypotheses or suggested solutions; collecting, organizing, and evaluating data; making deductions and reaching conclusions; and at last, carefully testing the conclusions to determine whether they fit the formulating hypothesis (1). Research comes in many forms, each tailored to a unique set of circumstances like its intended outcomes, duration, location, and other parameters. Some of them are as follows: Descriptive, Analytic, Applied, Fundamental, Qualitative, quantitative, conceptual, empirical, one-time research, longitudinal research, laboratory research, clinical or diagnostic research, historical research, Exploratory research, etc.

Research is the art of investigation to get acquainted with a phenomenon and to achieve insight into it. In order to execute this act of systematic and careful investigation in a proper way, what becomes imperative is a well-structured blueprint that can provide an overview of the research project so as to

make others understand the methodologies, significance, scope, and feasibility of the research. Such a blueprint, which provides a detailed description of how one proposes to undertake research, is known as a research proposal. A research proposal is a plan, a mirror of the research, which reflects how research is anticipated to be carried out. Therefore, if conducting research is an activity, a research proposal is a plan that reflects the research's intended methodology. It tries to establish a conceptual framework. The main function of a research proposal is "to detail the operational plan for obtaining answers to the research questions. In doing so it ensures and reassures the reader of the validity of the methodology for obtaining answers to the research questions accurately and objectively" (Kumar 218).

Research proposals can be basically of two types-internal research proposal and external research proposal. The internal research proposals may be academic or non-academic and external research proposals may be solicited and unsolicited. A properly structured research proposal consists of the following components: title, introduction, statement of the problem, review of related literature, objective of the study, hypothesis, research methodology, research design, population, sample, research tools, data collection and analysis, data presentation and analysis, conclusion, and references. Therefore, a neatly structured research proposal becomes instrumental in ensuring the execution of a research study in a proper way. In a similar vein, exploratory research acts as a crucial component in determining the viability of a research proposal.

A comprehensive review of the literature unearths how exploratory research helps in developing an extensive literature review and thereby assists in identifying the research gaps and opportunities, and thus, aids the researcher in deftly delineating the scope, objectives, and methodologies of the study in the form of a research proposal (Nte and Awi). Exploratory research aids researchers in staying abreast of emerging research trends, theoretical terrains, and innovative applications of methodologies, thereby ensuring the development of knowledge within the field. Exploratory research assists in pinpointing research gaps and opportunities and thereby contributes towards formulating an effective research proposal (Porte). As highlighted in the article titled, "Writing a Research Proposal: Planning and Communicating Your Research Ideas Effectively", this type of research helps in crafting and communicating research ideas effectively (Eve). This type of research helps in refining research questions and establishing feasibility. In the article, "The Critical Steps for Successful Research: The Research Proposal and Scientific Writing", it has been brought to light that this type of research aids in identifying novel research topics (Jagadeesh *et al.*).

Exploratory research is the type of research that offers the opportunity to explore either an existing problem or a new phenomenon and derive insight from it. This type of research is also known as phenomenological research, and its primary focus is on the generation of new ideas and insights. Given that one of the primary objectives of such research is the formulation of a problem so as to carry out precise research on a phenomenon, this kind of research is also known as a formulative research study. This inexpensive, unstructured, inconclusive, interactive, and open-ended research design, which primarily generates qualitative data (albeit, it can also produce quantitative data at times), serves as a solid foundation for research.

Qualitative exploratory research uses non-numerical data with a view to shedding light on intricate human behaviours, attitudes, and experiences. This type of research subsumes methods like in-depth interviews, focus groups, case studies, ethnography, and content analysis. It provides researchers with ample scope to amass in-depth data that can provide insight into intricate phenomena. Conversely, quantitative exploratory research aims at pinpointing and quantifying the presence, magnitude, and distribution of certain phenomena with the help of numerical data. This type of research includes methods like Surveys, experiments, and observational studies. The researchers find the scope of formulating and testing hypotheses, and thereby identifying patterns or trends that can be broadly applicable to a larger population.

Exploratory research, as opposed to descriptive and diagnostic research studies, is distinguished by its adaptable research design, non-probability sampling design, and unstructured observational design. It does not use a statistical design that has been pre-planned for analysis, nor does it make any decisions that are firmly established regarding operational procedures. The following is a list of the goals that exploratory research strives to accomplish:

- i). Bringing clarity to a concept or phenomenon that is not well defined and gaining an understanding of it,
- ii). Investigating a phenomenon and developing generalizations that are inductively derived from that exploration.
- iii). Defining the Research Problem.
- iv). Constructing a Hypothesis (but not testing the Hypothesis).

- v). Figuring out the Variables.
- vi). Making the right decision regarding the research design, and
- vii). Coming up with novel data and putting it all together to form grounded theory.

As far as the methods of collecting data are concerned, this type of research utilizes information that is derived from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include data collected through surveys or polls, interviews, focus groups, and observations, while secondary sources include online research, literature reviews, case study research, and so on. Of these, the three methods that are of utmost importance with respect to this research design are

- i). The survey of concerning literature, which is the easiest method of formulating the research problem and developing a hypothesis by concentrating on the hypothesis formed by other researchers, reviewing of available materials and even reviewing of the bibliography already made in one's area of interest,
- ii). The experience survey, which aids in the process of formulating research questions by enabling the researcher to conduct interviews with individuals who have firsthand knowledge of the topic that is going to be researched, and
- iii). Analysis of 'insight-stimulating' examples, which is another productive method for formulating hypothesis. This method involves the intensive study of the selected instances of the phenomenon in which one is interested.

Exploratory research is an indispensable research design that unequivocally plays a significant role in ensuring the validity of a research proposal. Exploration may be of different types:

- i). Inquiry-driven exploration,
- ii). Inventive investigation
- iii). Quest for revelation, and
- iv). Limited exploration.

Usually, at the very outset, a researcher remains engrossed in doubt regarding a phenomenon. The best way to eradicate this doubt and convert it into insight is to explore. Such exploration systematically represented in the research proposal consolidates one's idea and thereby ascertains the feasibility of the research. The utility of exploratory research is obvious in this respect.

When a researcher has little to no scientific knowledge about a particular aspect or situation but there is enough reason to believe that it contains elements worth discovering, exploratory research becomes an important tool for the researcher to explore. A research proposal dispels any and all uncertainties regarding the viability of such a discovery.

Usually carried out at an initial stage, exploratory research lays the strong foundation of research by projecting the research problem, which serves as the most essential part of a research proposal. Exploratory research also helps in developing hypotheses, identifying variables, and selecting a research design and thus acts as instrumental in determining the usefulness of a research proposal.

Conclusion

Despite having limitations like challenges in ascertaining causal relationships between variables, difficulty in replication, and probability of leading to ambiguity in conclusions, this cost-effective, tentative, and malleable research method enables a researcher to investigate a

phenomenon by developing a working hypothesis and formulating a research problem, and thereby, helps in clarifying and crystalizing problems and concepts for research proposal. This type of research aids researchers in verifying the feasibility of the research at an early stage by providing insight into whether or not the problem outlined in the research proposal is worth investing time in, and thus, it serves as the imperative initial phase for successful clinical inquiry. All of these factors, taken together, lend credence to the idea that exploratory research is an efficient method for laying the groundwork for subsequent research by means of an efficient research proposal.

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