

LEGAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND ITS ENTAILS

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the essential elements which are required for writing reference with specific focus to the legal research proposal. An author intends to articulate organised structure and methods as required to appear in to any legal proposal research which at the end of the intended work; a student shall be able to present findings and conclusion through broken and clear steps which were taken at the beginning of the thesis/dissertation.

This article is divided in to three (3) categories including introduction, main theme of the article and concluding remarks purposely to provide clear picture to the legal research student (s) and to understand the contents of this article.

Introduction is the first category to be presented in this article. An author intends to provide a general idea of the entire article and its scope by identifying objective(s) and purposely for the legal research student to understand what are supposed to have in their head(s) before staring writing research legal proposal.

The second category of this article covers the main theme of the article. At this category, an author articulate parts of legal research proposal including research title, statement of the problem, research question(s), objectives and hypotheses of the research, and research methodology. Research title is the first thing for a research student to bear in her/his mind in order to frame adequate and reliable research questions which are accompanied by the statement of the problem. Having an idea of a research work, a researcher will provide reliable hypothesis scenario of its work that idea will formulate adequate hypothetical question(s) to assist a research student to have a focused work ahead; and apart from that, that idea will formulate a concise statement of the problem and research question(s). statement of the problem and research questions are the key instruments for any legal research; these two aspects are useful and important because if there are no statement of the problem and research question(s) that means there is nothing to search for. And further to that, an author intends to prescribe styles and formatting of research methodology how should be conducted in order to

provide sufficient information and indications of reliable source for a legal research student to conduct its information including desktop research, interview and conversations research, and case study research. And the last part of this article covers a concluding remark from the articulated essential elements on writing legal research proposal purposely to bring to an end of this article.

“Everywhere, our knowledge is incomplete and problems are waiting to be solved. We address the void in our knowledge and those unresolved problems by asking relevant questions and seeking answers to them. The role of research is to provide a method for obtaining those answers by inquiringly studying the evidence within the parameters of the scientific method”.

- Leedy¹

1. Introduction

Writing a legal research is not a new phenomenal, it has been written since then.² Various authors have written different articles to present legal skills among other things for legal writing proposal.³ Cordon⁴ state that

Not only does the 1992 Mac Crate Report, issued by the American Bar Association Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession, include legal research as a fundamental lawyering skill,' but legal research has also been said to be the only skill included therein that supports the nine other fundamental lawyering skills.⁵

¹ Leedy P.D. Research, Scientific Method, Research and Development (2013:1).

² Osborne LC *A Methodical Approach to Legal Research: The Legal Research Plan, an Essential Tool for Today's Law Student and New Attorney* Legal Reference Services Quarterly [2013:54-77]; Osborne further states that

The concept of a methodical approach to legal research is not new; it is found in legal research texts in varying forms as far back as the 1940s.

³ Strong FR *Pedagogical Implications of Inventorying Legal Capacities* 3 J. Legal Education (1951: 555-558); Strong says that:

The MacCrate Report was certainly not the first instance where legal research has been included as an important skill or competency.

⁴ Cordon MC *Task Mastery in Legal Research Instruction* Law Library Journal Volume 103:3 [2011:25].

⁵ Cordon [2011:25].

Additional to that, Cordon⁶ emphases for the following reports to indicate the desirability of authors to keep on reporting legal skills. He further articulate that

The MacCrate Report was followed more than a decade later by the publication of a report from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Best Practices for Legal Education: A Vision and a Road Map, produced by the Clinical Legal Education Association.

Despite of being written before, it is evidently that there is a need to demonstrate and address this issue as much as needed to improve and develop efficient methods which brings knowledge on how to prepare a proposal to the legal researcher.⁷ In order to fulfil the desire of the author, this article elucidates the necessary criterial including research title, statement of the problem, research question(s), objectives and hypotheses of the research, and research methodology which are required to be seen and considered to any legal research.⁸ It includes vivid examples to illustrate the significance to utilize the approach.

2. What is a Research

A question above is a normal and genuine statement which every student shall bear in her/his mind in order to understand the reason of that question. Any person who wants to do a research must have knowledge of what is a research and the contents which are supposed to be focused as illustrated above.⁹ Research is always known a scientific investigation which is conducted by a researcher who is able to make analysis of the facts and being able to frame issues which are supported by subject area and legal authorities including cases and legislations.¹⁰

⁶ Cordon [201:396].

⁷ Paul DC *Time to Blossom: An Inquiry into Bloom's Taxonomy as a Hierarchy and Means for Teaching Legal Research Skills* 102 Law Library Journal [2010:191-192]; further to that, Steven MB *et al Fundamentals of Legal Research* 14 (9th ed., Foundation Press 2009) argue that

Development of a strategy maximizes efficiency and accuracy through a systematic approach to problem solving rather than focusing on mere serendipity.

⁸ See also Osborne (2013:60).

⁹ Osborne (2013:60).

¹⁰ See also Kothari CR *Research Methodology and Techniques* 2nd revised Edition New Age International Publishers (2004:1) New Delhi-India.

A good research proposal hinges in a good idea; and once a research student has a good idea, that student can present a good proposal. A researcher with a good idea always hinges on familiarity with the topic serves for long period in readings, observation, discussion, and incubation; and find out the missing and important parts in the topic. Similar to that, Kunz¹¹ *et al* emphasizes that

*Legal research is a skill you are learning in order to enhance your ability to solve legal problems. . . . To become proficient at choosing and gaining access to legal research materials you must analyse the legal problem being worked on, the strengths and weaknesses of the available sources, and your own areas of knowledge and ignorance. This analysis must continue all the way through the research process.*¹²

2.1 Subjective area with reference to Topic

Similar to the above, Salter and Mason Research signifies the systematic study of a topic. Research seeks to identify, describe and explain what the topic is and how it comes to be distinct from other similar phenomena.¹³ Research requires the ability to access and then critically assesses the various debates and issues that the topic has generated.¹⁴

Additional to that, Cottrell¹⁵ identifies keys which shall be considered by research students prior to his/her research as follows:

¹¹ Kunz CL *et al.*, *The Process of Legal Research* Little, Brown and Company (1986:4)

¹² See also Osborne (2013:61). Kunz (1986:4) further emphasizes that

A good researcher envisions legal research as a set of research 'game plans' (or strategies) and knows when to select which strategy. . . . Your research strategies should be flexible. . . . [E]ven the most diligent researcher, armed with the latest technology, will not be successful if he or she approaches legal research with a mechanical checklist devoid of flexibility and analysis.

¹³ Salter M and Mason J *Writing Law Dissertations an introduction and guide to the conduct of legal research* [2007:6] Pearson Education Limited [England] ;Turner C *et-all Legal Learning* 2nd edition Hodder Education Part of Hachette – UK (2008:212) provide that

a dissertation is a long essay written on a single topic, which you research by yourself. Think of it as an independent learning project designed to improve your expertise of the law and develop your legal research, intellectual and organisation skills.

¹⁴ Turner (2008:212).

¹⁵ Cottrell S *the Study Skills Handbook* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003:201).

- ❖ To be able to undertake a substantial piece of independent academic study,
- ❖ To be able to pursue in much greater depth a relevant topic that is interesting,
- ❖ To be able to develop a personal specialism,
- ❖ To be able to put a personal stamp on a piece of work,
- ❖ To be able to explore the literature on a chosen topic,
- ❖ To be able to refine and extend skills in finding, selecting and critically analysing information,
- ❖ To be able to refine skills in decision making, task management and problem solving,
- ❖ To be able to refine skills in summarising and presenting findings.¹⁶

Additionally, it has been proved that research works vary in scope and topics and the rest share the most common keys of characteristics.¹⁷ At every research, a researcher has an obligations to determine the focus and direction of the work; a research work carried out as an individual work despite of having a supervisor to direct; and the last common character is that a research should be substantial component to the project which require the data collection and analysis of the legal instruments. Furthermore, Turner states that a researcher has a more prolonged engagement with the chosen subject..... in essence, a dissertation requires you to:

- ❖ Undertake an extensive programme of reading and research,
- ❖ Demonstrate intellectual independence and originality by choosing your own subject of study and defining its nature and scope,
- ❖ Engage in sustained analysis, interpretation and possibly comparison of a substantial body of data,
- ❖ Present the results of your research in a clearly written, cogently argued, logically structured and properly referenced form.

¹⁶ Turner *et-all* (2008:212).

¹⁷ Turner *et-all* (2008:212).

2.2 How to Choose a Topic?

In writing a research, the first stage in preparing a research is for a researcher to decide which topic he or she wish to investigate in details and to write about. At this stage, a researcher should take advantage of the opportunity to pursue a particular personal interest or develop an interest from selected subject.¹⁸ Initial strategy to a research student is to make sure a topic must be suitable area which may accompany by the following assumptions:

- ❖ What do a research wants to do?
- ❖ What do a researcher wants to investigate?
- ❖ How can she/he achieve her/his objectives?
- ❖ Are there any aspects which a student found particularly interesting of controversial?
- ❖ Are there any issues in the news that a researcher feels may or indeed should impact on an area of law?
- ❖ Will it be appropriate or indeed necessary to carry out empirical research, and if so- what methodology should I adopt?¹⁹

2.3 Things to Be Considered When Choosing a Topic

Once a research student identified various possible topics, the following questions should be considered purposely to guide a student to select a suitable topic, and these are:

- ❖ If she/he have prior knowledge of the subject,

¹⁸ See also Turner *et-all* (2008:214); the authors further articulate that,

A student need to choose an area that:

- ❖ Will hold your interest for the duration of the dissertation,
- ❖ Is not so broad that it prevents you getting into the details of the law and is thus unmanageable, and
- ❖ Is not so focused on a narrow area that is prevents you from reaching the word limit.

¹⁹ See also Salter and Mason (2007:9).

- ❖ Is there any genuine interest at that topic?
- ❖ Is the idea focused?
- ❖ Is it worth enough to investigate?

Similar to the above, Salter and Mason²⁰ say that,

*Once you have decided on a specific topic, brainstorming, creating spider/wheel diagrams and mind 'mapping is useful planning tools. Each of these activities will provide you with a diagram showing how ideas or different elements can be linked to each other so as to form a logic sequence.*²¹

Additional to that, a research student should ask her/himself the following questions

- ❖ Has the considered activity highlighted uncertainties or gaps where she needs to do some further research, and
- ❖ And how she is going to abstain and gathered information

And finally, once a research student identified specific topic with reference to his/her subject area, a researcher is needed to plan his/her research strategy by providing some ideas at the outset as the core aspect and the marginal issue to the selected topic. A researcher is supposed to think overriding question(s) which may lead to seek the answer(s) to the core issue(s).²²

And once a research student is satisfied with her or his selected interest topic, a researcher is able to write a working title.

²⁰ Salter and Mason (2007:10).

²¹ Salter and Mason (2007:11) state that

once you have decided upon the actual topic, you will need to focus on exactly what you are aiming to do. You can do this by stating your research topic and then considering whether any of the following action verbs (analyse, assess, review, evaluate, discuss, explore, compare) would indicate your readers exactly what you are setting out to do in the dissertations. You can the incorporate the appropriate verb into your dissertation title.

²² See also Salter and Mason (2007:11).

3. Research Proposal Entails

Any legal research shall be written once a proposal submitted to the organised institution and approved. Research proposal is an intellectual effect which specifies what a researcher wants to do, and how the intended work will interpret the results.

That research shall provide research title with similar contents to statement of the problem and research question(s) in order to indicate there is something to be researched as a researcher is looking for a solution to a problem;²³ and that title shall demonstrate the growing need to improve and develop efficient legal structure to solve the problem as established by the title.²⁴ With similar point, Granagham²⁵ state that

in approving the proposal, your committee gives their best judgment that the approach to the research is reasonable and likely to yield the anticipated results.

Addition to that, various authors articulate other aspect to be considered by the researchers throughout the time including scopes, limitation of time, identification of useful resources, restriction in use and jurisdiction clause. Similar to that, Sloan²⁶ directs the researcher to consider the scope of the project including any time limits; generate search terms; recognize

²³ Cohen ML ed., *How to Find the Law* 7th edition West Publishing Company (1976:352); and also Kunz *et al* articulate that: legal research requires more than a familiarity with the major research sources and a map of the library and further state that

Legal research is really legal problem solving. Successful legal research largely depends upon developing a research approach that combines (1) factual analysis based on legal categories with (2) deductive and inductive reasoning in the use of primary and secondary authority and finding tools. Successful researchers continually re-evaluate their research methodology and consider alternative research approaches as they find that various sources or research approaches are helpful or fruitless. Even the most diligent researcher, armed with the latest technology, will not arrive at a successful result if he or she approaches legal research as a mechanical process devoid of analysis.'

²⁴ Osborne A *Methodical Approach to Legal Research: The Legal Research Plan, an Essential Tool for Today's Law Student and New Attorney* Legal Reference Services Quarterly (2013:63): Osborne state that

The legal research plan is used as the instrument to teach the approach and illustrate the associated benefits, and it provides the method to be internalized.

²⁵ McGranaghan M *Guidelines on writing a research proposal*.....available at[accessed on 5th of April, 2016]; Granagham state that:

The objective in writing a proposal is to describe what you will do, why should it be done, how you will do it, and what you expect will result.

²⁶ Sloan AE *Basic Legal Research Tools and Strategies* 4th ed., Wolters Kluwer (2009: 305–306).

the end product to be generated; identify potentially useful sources, the intended sequence of use, and any restrictions on use; and specifies the jurisdiction.

3.1 Title

A good title will clue the reader into the topic but it cannot tell the whole story. Follow the title with a strong introduction. A title provides a brief overview that tells a fairly well informed (but perhaps non-specialist) reader what the proposal is about. It might be as short as a single page, but it should be very clearly written, and it should let one assess whether the research is relevant or not.²⁷ The UCLA Law Library²⁸ provide that

Once the general legal terms are identified, the user will likely need to become more familiar with a specific area of law. Most researchers find it helpful to start with a secondary source such as a legal encyclopaedia, a treatise, or a legal periodical article before researching primary authority.

It has been indicated that a title of any research shall be supported by initial steps namely as legal issue(s), legal resources, find legislation (s) and any other legal instrument(s) to be used during his/her research²⁹. A research student shall identify legal issue(s) which at the final of the work, those issues shall provide adequate and reliable answers established at the beginning.³⁰ Furthermore it is proved that

conducting a through reference interview will allow you to more effectively identified the legal resources that may provide answers to the user's questions.

Similarly, Cordon³¹ state that,

²⁷ Sloan (2009:305–306).

²⁸ UCLA Law Library's Online Legal Research: Beyond LexisNexis & Westla; Basic Legal Research Techniques Chapter 3 available at www.libguides.law.ucla.edu

²⁹ UCLA Law Library's Online Legal Research: Beyond LexisNexis & Westla; Basic Legal Research Techniques Chapter 3 available at www.libguides.law.ucla.edu

³⁰ ibid

³¹ Cordan (2011) 400;

the ability to devise and implement an effective research strategy is without question one of the more important abilities of an effective legal researcher, and question one of the more important abilities of an effective legal researcher.

Additional to that, American Bar Association known as (MacCrate Report)³² emphasizes that

‘Treat this as a distinct research skills, complete with several sub points focusing on this skills; a lawyer’s understanding of the process of devising and implementing a coherent and effective research design includes the following abilities:

- a) Formulating issues for research,
- b) Identify the full range of research strategies that could be used....as well as alternatives to research,
- c) Evaluating research strategies and choosing a research design, and
- d) Implementing research design’.

3.2 *Statement of the problem and Research Question*

Statement of the problem is the best and important initial aspect for writing any research. A researcher must have issues in order to formulate statement of the problem in the research question(s). At this stage, a researcher must have deep information and knowledge on the intended area of the research serves for the establishment of research questions including the information already known, and factual issues involved.³³ Additional to that, a research have to provide some of the illustrations and interpretations of the concept including historical perceptions which contribute factors leading to the problem of the statement towards

³² American Bar Association (1992) Selection of Legal Education and Admission to the Bar, Legal Education and Professional Development- an-Education Continuum: Report of the Task Force on Law Schools and Profession: Narrowing the GAP 138 (MacCrate Report)

³³ UCLA Law Library’s Online Legal Research: Beyond LexisNexis & Westla; Basic Legal Research Techniques Chapter 3 provide that

‘At this point, the most important task for the librarian is to try to ascertain the most relevant facts in the user’s reference question. Begin the reference interviewed by ascertaining:

- a) What information is already known?.....
- b)
- c) What are the factual issues involved?’

underlying principles and regulations purposely to inspire the study in order to place the problem in appropriate framework.³⁴

3.2.1 Research questions

Generally, researchers are encouraged to examine issues which must be responsible for possible answers and solutions to the research problem actually studied; and for that matter, researchers are advised to put research questions into categories in order to have a wide range in examining issues raised in the statement of the problem. The first category carries the basic research question, and the second category carry general questions to support the first category³⁵. The following are examples of the categorised research questions:

3.2.2 Basic Research Question

- To what extent does the?
- Do the.....?
- Is/any.....?

3.2.3 General Research Questions

Any legal research shall contain the five (5) W and these include

- What is?
- How.....?
- When.....
- Where.....?
- Why.....?

³⁴ See Saphy Bullu a partial version of the author's Ph.D. ongoing research at the North West University-Potchefstroom in South Africa 2018:1

³⁵ See Saphy Bullu a partial version of the author's Ph.D. ongoing research at the North West University-Potchefstroom in South Africa 2018:3

A researcher should pose some of the questions which based on the Five (5) W in order to provide adequate reasoning in framing the issues to be presented in the work.

3.3 Literature Review

Literature review is another important entail of the research proposal. This entail involve information collected in reading, concentration of reading which at the end, a researcher will come up with a new perception on legal issues. The purpose of literature review is to situate a research in the context of what is already known with reference of the topic.³⁶ Literature review not needs to be exhausted, is only needs to show how a research will benefit the entire work, and should provide theoretical basis of the research including what has been conducted within the focused area with other researchers with relevance to a research.³⁷ Addition to that, the guidelines on writing a research proposal from the Hawaii University provide that

‘in a literature review you should give the reader enough ties to the literature that they feel confident that you have found, read and assimilated the literature in the field. It might do well to include a paragraph that summarises each article’s contribution, and a bit of mortar to hold the edifice together, perhaps these come from your notes while reading the material. The flow should probably move from more general to the more focused studies, or perhaps use historical progression to develop the story. It needs not to be exhaustive; relevancy is key.’³⁸

A student is advisable to collect reliable information from multiple readings as illustrated bellow in order to provide enough support to his/her work. Once a student collect all the information from intended sources, that work should produce adequate materials to be conducted during research.

³⁶ See also Machi LA and McEvoy BT *The Literature Review: Six Steps to Success* (Corwin Press: Sage India Pvt. 2009) 2

³⁷ Machi LA and McEvoy BT (2009) 2 further articulate that

‘The basic literature review summarises and evaluates the existing knowledge on a particular topic; and its purpose is to produce a position on the state of that knowledge.....’(the emphases is mine).

³⁸ Available at www2.hawaii.edu [accessed on 1st of April, 2018]

The diagram below show sources of materials which a student shall go through during her/his research work.



the above diagram demonstrate clearly on what a research student should consider in her/his work and compare themes, methods, controversies, and conclusions among the referred authors, to make clear how the studies relate to one another with her/his research questions and

purpose.³⁹ Additional to that, integration writing: assessing sources/ writing a literature review state that ‘use the following steps in writing your literature review:

- i. Organise your sources by detecting a pattern that helps you explain why one group of sources comes up with one answer and another group comes up with another answer.
- ii. Summarise these different groups of sources in terms of how they address the question: what methodology, evidence, critical concepts, etc....do they employ?
- iii. Analyse the content of these sources in terms of the answer they provide to your central question or in terms of the question they raise (which may be slightly different from your question). Show how they offer important insights. Show how they neglect particular areas.⁴⁰

3.4 Assumptions and hypothesis

Every research student shall have a point of departure in his/her mind purposely to formulate issues with reference to the research intended; and that point of departure shall be guided with assumptions and hypothesis. The following examples illustrate assumptions and hypotheses serves for understanding.

³⁹ Machi LA and McEvoy BT (2009) 2 provide that

‘the basic literature review begins when you select and identify a research interest or issue for inquiry; this is the duty question.’

⁴⁰ Available at www.bothell.washington.edu [retrieved on 4th of April, 2018]; in this material, authors indicates the major roles played in the literature review as follows:

- It locates our research question within the scholarly debate relevant to our concerns,
- We don't need to reinvent the wheel, so we need to discover what has been done and represent it,
- We let the reader see the history of the question and demonstrate that we have done our homework, and
- We identify what has not been done, or what has not been done well.

3.4.1 Assumptions

- (a) The current legal framework does not meaningfully contribute to the proper and adequate instruments with reference to intended research;
- (b) The environment and infrastructure are not reliable and secure to provide adequate tools with reference to intended research; and
- (c) Most countries (mention the few with reference to intended research), lack specific rules and effective legal and formal frameworks.

3.4.2 Hypotheses

At hypotheses stage, a research student shall have brief information which he/she believe there is a reason to conduct that research. For instance, a research student shall state like that

‘Africa has not yet established effective legal instruments to fight against due to the fact that the existing legal frameworks are still lagging behind. Therefore these instruments are weak and inadequate. New social and legal developments are geared towards serving and curing the existing weaknesses of the current legal framework; and seemingly, the weak approach has contributed to the weakness of the current legal framework to fight against.’

3.5 Objective of the study

The purpose of providing objective(s) in the research proposal is to describe what a researcher will do, why that research should be conducted, why a researcher decided to do that research, how that research will be done, and what the expectations of the results are. For instance, a researcher shall state that

‘The main objective of this study is to contribute to the improvement of legal framework by means of examination and analysis of the legal frameworks and practices with reference to the protection of e-consumers in Africa. The choice of examination and analysis of the legal system is deliberate on the ground that, an offence committed on the run; committed through conspiracy, in secrecy and in the dark.’

Illustrations below provide a clear picture to research student on how to separate objective(s) for the same purpose.

3.5.1 Primary Objective

The primary objective is always used as a key instrument to determine the effectiveness of the existed legal framework whether are adequate and reliable to be taken by a researcher to provide a solution to the problem; and at the same time, the existed legal framework can be used as a key instrument to bring challenges for the solution. For instance, a researcher can raise a question as to what extent legal systems contribute to the ineffective structure to solve a problem, and how that issue can be addressed.

3.5.2 Secondary Objective

In order to reach the primary objective, a researcher shall consider the following secondary objectives as identified.

- (a) Explore theories in relation to the statement of the problem.
- (b) Explore international legal framework concerning the problem in order to recommend best practices and a formal legal framework to with reference to the problem.
- (c) Investigate the extent of the difficulties on the legal framework
- (d) Explore to what extent the existing national legislations fail to provide adequate solution to the problem.
- (e) Explore how more developed countries manage to deal with the same problem effectively.
- (f) Evaluate the extent of current legal frameworks that provide a viable and reliable tool for the solution.
- (g) Identify criteria that can be put in place to contribute to a proper and adequate current legal framework for the solution.

- (h) Propose a suitable legal framework that will be able to adequately for the solution.

At this stage, a researcher should make clear to the research reader the intended approach of the research question and legal techniques and logic which a researcher will use to address the research. This approach shall introduce the use of literature study where analysis of primary and secondary source of information in order to address the focus and aim of the research. These sources include academic literature, legislations, case law, policies, research studies, international legal initiatives, reports, government documents, protocols and treaties in relation to the topic.⁴¹

4 Conclusion

As it has been presented, it is clear that any research work shall have a route to be taken in order to make clear the necessary procedure to go through. Despite of having various kinds of research work such as qualitative and quantitative research, all of the work shall present the intended work through methodologies, objectives, hypotheses, research questions as keys instrument to deliver the work. The destination of each research shall provide answers relates to questions establish and provide a way forward for the intended work. And further to that, a research work has a duty to introduce recommendations for further actions to be considered. And for that route, that work will be recognised as a research.

⁴¹ Saphy Ph.D Research Proposal (2018:8).

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