

TITLE IN ALL CAPS

by

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APPROVED BY:

Chair of Dissertation Advisory Committee

Dissertation Committee Member

Dissertation Committee Member

ABSTRACT

Name, Title, (under the direction of [dissertation chair's name])

Text goes here. This is usually not completed until the dissertation is completed. Key search terms are placed at the end.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Broadly describes your research focus and explains why the focus is worthy of study. This section identifies the problem and then discusses your proposed solution (i.e. the title/focus of your study). Then, it should clearly discuss the gap in the literature (a need or opportunity that has been identified by other scholars and researchers in the literature – not your personal opinion) and states how your study (your proposed solution) will further existing research. All statements of fact and statistics should be attributed to the appropriate source and be the most current (i.e. National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress, relevant state regulatory agencies, federal agencies such as the United States Census Bureau). The overwhelming majority of citations should be **from within the last five years**.

The minimum length is anywhere from 1 ½ pages to four pages. Make sure each paragraph contains at least three sentences (topic sentence, supporting details, and conclusion) and make sure each paragraph properly transitions to the next. Also remember that there is only one space after every period. Make sure educational jargon is defined at the time it is introduced and that the word also appears in the Definition of Terms (i.e. achievement gap, students of color). Make sure all racial terms are capitalized (i.e. Black, White, African American).

A note about citations. Single source citations can indicate a lack of rigor. Make sure you have at least two to three citations for your statements of fact. Make sure you have at least three or four for major points or to indicate an issue is a long-standing

concern. Moreover, do not reference “recent studies” with citations that are more than three years old.

Statement of the Problem

Using declarative statements, explain the problem and how and why it has developed over time. It should include the significance, magnitude, and importance of the problem to educational leadership, social justice, and transformative leadership (these are the tenets of FSU’s doctoral program). Previous studies in this area that indicate the gap, identify the gap, and justify your study should be included. Remember, the problem is not your opinion. The problem is identified and supported by other researchers and scholars. This means this section must contain citations. The recommended length can be anywhere from three paragraphs to three to four pages.

Purpose of the Study

This section discusses the purpose of your study and who the purpose will benefit (i.e. practitioners, policymakers, administrators, educator preparation programs, etc.). If this is a qualitative study, you should have language that is consistent with this: *“The purpose/intent/objective of this qualitative [narrative, ethnography, case study, phenomenological] study is to (describe, understand, explore, deepen, develop) _____ (the phenomena you are studying).*

Significance of the Study

Identifies and describes why the study is important to the field of educational leadership/social justice/transformative leadership and states the practical implications of the potential results. It also discusses how the research may extend or contribute to

existing research, models, or theories. Again, this section is not opinion. It should align with existing research, models, or theories or explain unexplored research.

Recommended minimum length is one page.

Theoretical Framework

Frameworks are required components of dissertations at Fayetteville State University. The framework (theoretical = theory or conceptual = model) is the lens through which your study is viewed. It lays the foundation for your research questions and are reflected in your research questions. You cannot develop your research questions without your framework. Before you select it, make sure you discuss with your chair to ensure what you are using provides the best lens for your research aims.

A mixed methods dissertation is by definition and combination of two distinct but complimentary research designs. In this section the researcher is to defend why this mixed inquiry is justified and how the approach by its combination of techniques is uniquely qualified to answer the research questions and thereby provide perspectives either approach alone fails to do. It is critical that the researcher discuss how the two approaches support each other and more importantly create knowledge and understanding that otherwise would not be possible with this mixed inquiry.

State clearly and forthrightly which framework(s) you are using. As this is two approaches the researcher should provide frameworks that are aligned to each type of inquiry or one that effectively combines the two. Provide history and background that includes the leading scholars and researchers associated with the framework. Explain its tenets, assumptions, and where relevant, its evolution. Most importantly, explain why it is

best for your topic and why it is central to understanding the phenomenon under study.

Minimum length should be at least two pages.

Research Questions

Research questions are **not** the same as interview questions that you will ask.

Research questions are developed from your framework and are greatly influenced by your Statement of the Problem. For example, if your framework is Bandura's self-efficacy, then your research questions will center around the elements of Self-Efficacy Theory. If your framework is Critical Race Theory, your research questions will reflect the elements of CRT. For qualitative studies, there is generally a guiding question with related questions. While there is no set number of questions, four to five are relatively standard for qualitative studies. Note: **research questions must not be formulated as yes or no questions**. For quantitative inquiry you list them as RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, etc.

Hypotheses are optional. Questions in Chapter 1 are optional but required in Chapter 3.

It is suggested that the questions are complimentary such that they build on each other and provide understanding that is expansive in nature. For example, the quantitative component may present results that report on a condition or phenomena while the qualitative component would report out perspectives or experiences the research participants had as a result of living the phenomena in question. In short, the questions must be aligned, supportive, and natural extensions of the mixed inquiry.

Assumptions (optional as per committee's discretion)

This section is included if this is a qualitative study. It explains your interest in the topic and any bias you bring to the study. Including it is also an accepted strategy for validation of your study. Although is a highly personal part of your research any facts should be backed up with citations. Suggested minimum length is 1 to 1 ½ pages.

Definition of Terms (in alphabetical order)

All terms specifically relevant to the topic under study should be defined in text as they are used and in this section. Note that generally understood terms do not meet this threshold. Terms are defined according to how they are used in the literature, not how they are defined in dictionaries. For example, secondary education can mean 9th to 12th grade or 10th to 12th grade in the literature. You, as the researcher, get to decide but you must define it according to its specific use for your study and your use of terms must be consistent.

Word: definition with citation at the end

Word: definition with citation at the end.

Organization of the Study

Explain how the dissertation is organized in this section. Stay consistent with roman numerals for chapter headings (i.e. do not use Chapter One since our chapters are

written as “Chapter I”). Remember to have at least three sentences per paragraph.

Minimum length is one paragraph.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

The introductory paragraph to the literature review restates the purpose of your study. Next, it explains what you are reviewing and its significance to your topic. The literature review should cover some or all of the following (again, check with your chair first): (1) overview or historical background of your problem, (2) analyzes and synthesizes literature related to the foundation, theories, and existing knowledge (this must include research studies with findings – not just journal articles) related to your problem and purpose, (3) analyzes and synthesizes the literature related to the justification of your study.

Before you begin your literature review, develop your list of headings and sub-headings and get them approved. For suggestions, look at other dissertations on your topic to see what areas they covered. Getting approval up front will ensure you are moving in the right direction. You should be reviewing the most recent literature available and that must include other dissertations. You can group the literature according to theoretical perspectives, time periods, reform efforts, or methodology (quantitative or qualitative). Unless specifically requested by your chair, your literature review does not have to include your theoretical or conceptual framework. Literature reviews that are less than 20 pages can signal that you do not have a complete grasp of your topic and the related literature. Be careful that your review does not read like a book report.

Topic One

Sub-topic

This is level three heading

Topic Two***Sub-topic***

This is level three

Sub-topic of Sub-topic. This is level four heading

Summary

Use one or two paragraphs to summarize the findings from the literature review.

CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

The introductory paragraph can briefly restate the purpose of the study in narrative form with your research questions. Then, explain what the chapter will cover. This includes the research design, the study participants, sampling method used, an explanation of data collection and analysis, measures to ensure credibility and trustworthiness, and ethics and risks.

Research Design – Mixed Methods

In this section the research provides a brief but thorough presentation of how the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was necessary and critical in the deep understanding of the phenomena being studied.

Qualitative Inquiry

(Narrative, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, Case Study)

For any study, it is highly recommended that you purchase a book on the specific research design you are conducting in order to easily discuss the features of your research approach. This is especially relevant for qualitative studies. You want to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the features of your particular approach. For example, there are two kinds of phenomenological studies that are commonly used in qualitative research, descriptive and interpretative. If you are conducting a phenomenological study, you need to know the differences between them and discuss which one you are using and why.

Also, make sure you are familiar with the researchers who are identified with each approach. You should pull at least five or six sources that are different from the ones you

used in the previous section on research design. Here again, familiarize yourself with the epistemology, ontology, and axiology perspectives. This will give your methodology depth. You should have at minimum three pages. Creswell (2013) explicates the characteristics of the five most common qualitative approaches on pages 104-105. See sample language below.

Samples (1) If I could discover the meaning of one person's or a group of person's lived experiences, I would ask him/her about xxx = narrative; (2) If I could discover the shared lived experiences of one quality or phenomenon in others, I would want to know xxx = phenomenology; (3) If I could discover what actually occurred and was experienced in a single lived event, that event would be xxx = case study.

Qualitative Research Design

The research design is the one of the most important decisions you make. It is directly influenced by your research questions. Since this is a qualitative template, discuss specific features that illustrate its suitability. These should include philosophical assumptions such as epistemology, ontology, and axiology. Make sure to address at least three features and make sure you are citing at least five different researchers. The recommended minimum length for this section is 1 ½ to 2 ½ pages.

Study Participants

Describe the criteria you will establish or established for your participants and justify with citations from the literature. For example, if you plan to interview teachers, explain the level (elementary, middle school, secondary), whether not they needed to

have a specific length of time in the classroom, the gender if it is pertinent, etc. If you plan to use or used pseudonyms, state that here.

The second part to this section is where you discuss your sampling procedures. Make sure you are not using quantitative terms (i.e. surveys, instrument). Instead, you should be using qualitative terms (i.e. interviews, recruitment strategies) for qualitative studies. Do not forget to state that before your study commences, you will secure the proper approvals from the relevant entities (e.g. Institutional Review Board, school district, etc.). For your dissertation, demographic data is best illustrated in a table. Minimum length is one page.

Data Collection Procedures and Management

Describe step by step how you intend to collect your data (for quantitative studies this includes where and how you will collect your data). If data is collected in parallel, be sure to state and explain. Keep in mind that you want to be specific in case other researchers want to replicate the steps. Again, use quantitative terms for quantitative studies and qualitative terms for qualitative studies. For example, typical collection procedures for qualitative studies are observations, field notes, interviews, and review of documents. However, there are different types of observations and different types of interviews. Know the terms/differences and state specifically which ones you will employ. For data management, state how data will be kept, where it will be kept, and how long it will be stored.

Qualitative Data Interpretation and Analysis

Describe step by step how you intend to analyze your data. Remember, you will begin with raw data. There are some researchers who have established credible data analysis steps for different qualitative approaches. For instance, there is an extensive body of literature on analyzing data for phenomenological studies and case studies. You can identify such methods by Guba and Lincoln or Creswell, or Yin, or another scholar. Just make sure you cite them properly.

You want to make sure you address the transcription process in detail for interviews, focus groups, and even observations and field notes. It is not enough to simply state the data will be coded for emergent themes. Specifically address whether you are using content analysis, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, constant comparative analysis, inductive/deductive reasoning (or some variation thereof), and the various coding procedures. Read as much as you can about qualitative data analysis to ensure this section communicates rigor. If you are describing this section after you have collected your data, make sure you explain how your techniques aligned with your research questions and your research design. Finally, if you are using a qualitative (i.e. NVivo) or quantitative (SPSS) software management program, explain it and cite it.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

This section is one of the more important ones in this chapter. For qualitative studies, the more common terms are credibility and trustworthiness. In either event, this section needs to detail the measures employed. Here as well, you need to make sure you are citing more than one source. Recommended minimum length is 1 to 1 ½ pages.

Quantitative Inquiry

Quantitative Research Design and Rationale

Identify the research design and its connection to the research questions. Concisely state the study variables (independent, dependent, covariate, mediating, moderating variables), as appropriate. Explain any time and resource constraints consistent with the design choice. Describe how design choice is consistent with research designs needed to advance knowledge in the discipline. If you are conducting an intervention study, you must defend your choice of intervention. Make sure you have at least three to four citations, in addition to Creswell, to justify your research design.

Population

Needs to be described in sufficient depth so that other researchers can replicate the study. For any study, it is highly recommended that you purchase a book on the specific research design you are conducting in order to easily discuss the features of your research methodology. You want to demonstrate a thorough understanding. Define the target population. State the size (if known) or approximate/estimated size.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

Identify and justify the type of sampling strategy. Explain specific procedures for how the sample will be drawn or was drawn. Describe the sampling frame (inclusion and exclusion criteria). Use a power analysis to determine sample size and include: justification for the effect size, alpha level, and power level chosen. Cite the source for calculating or the tool used to calculate the sample size.

Data Collection Procedures and Management

Thoroughly describe recruiting procedures and particular demographic information that will be collected or was collected. Describe how participants will be or were provided with informed consent. Describe, step by step, how data will be or was collected. Explain how participants exited the study (e.g. debriefing procedures, etc.) If this is a pilot study, describe the relationship of the pilot study to the main study (e.g. what is the purpose of the pilot study?). If conducting an intervention, describe clearly and thoroughly the nature of the treatment, intervention, or experimental manipulation, how it will be designed and administered, and by whom and to whom it will be or was administered.

If you are using archival data, include all procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Describe the procedures for gaining access to the data set. Describe the necessary permission to gain access to the data set. If historical documents or legal documents are used as sources of data, demonstrate the reputability of the sources and justify why they represent the best sources of data. Be sure to state where and how data will be stored in accordance with FSU's data retention policy.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

For published instruments, discuss the name of developer of the instrument and year of publication. Describe the appropriateness of the instrument for your study. State that permission to use the instrument was obtained from the developer (or relevant party/entity). Discuss the published reliability and validity values relevant to their use in

the study. Discuss where or with what population the instrument was previously used and how validity and reliability were established.

If you are conducting an intervention study or manipulating a variable, identify materials/programs applied as treatment or manipulation. Provide information on the developer of the material/programs. If published, state where, how, and with which populations the instrument was previously used. If researcher-developed materials, state the basis for development and how the materials were developed. Finally, provide evidence that another agency will sponsor intervention studies (i.e. clinical interventions).

For operationalization, describe each variable, including its definition. Describe how the variable/scale score is calculated. Be sure to include what the scores represent, and an example item.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Identify software used for analyses. Provide explanation of data cleaning and screening procedures as appropriate for the study. Restate the research questions and hypotheses here as written in Chapter I. Describe in detail the analysis plan including the statistical tests that will be used to test the hypotheses; procedures used to account for multiple statistical tests, rationale for inclusion of potential covariates or confounding variables, and how results will be/were interpreted (key parameter estimates, confidence intervals or probability values, odds ratios, etc.).

Validity and Reliability

This section is one of the more important ones in this chapter. Describe threats to external validity (for example, testing reactivity, interaction effects of selection and

experimental variables, specificity of variables, reactive effects of experimental arrangements, and multiple treatment interference) and how they will be or were addressed. Also describe threats to internal validity (for example, history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, statistical regression, experimental mortality, and selection-maturation interaction) and how they will be or were addressed. Finally, describe any threats to construct or statistical validity. Be sure to define the terms.

Risks

First, define risks for the type of study you are conducting. Second, address how risks are inherent in all research endeavors. Next, discuss any risks or potential harm your participants will face and how you will mitigate them. Recommended minimum length is one page.

Ethics

Explain why principles and ethics are important to research. Then discuss how your study will meet or met an acceptable standard of ethics regarding protecting the privacy and confidentiality of your participants. Here is where you address the informed consent process, strategies to prevent coercion, and any potential conflicts of interest. Make sure you know the document retention policy of FSU. The recommended minimum length is 1 to 1½ pages. Reference your IRB approval letter and Informed Consent in Appendices.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations refer to factors that can impact a study that are beyond the control of the researcher and they exist in all research endeavors (Simon, 2011). In some instances,

this section may not be completed until after you have collected and analyzed data. In any event, only discuss aspects of the study that you, as the researcher, did not direct or control.

Delimitations of the Study

Unlike limitations, delimitations result from specific choices made by the researcher (Simon & Goes, 2013). Delimitations are those that the researcher imposes on the study thereby narrowing the focus of the studied phenomenon or topic (Irby, Lunenburg, Lara-Alecio, & Tong, 2015). For instance, the researcher decides if participants will be one gender or another or both, whether the participants, if they are teachers, have three years' experience or ten years' experience. A plethora of decisions are determined solely by the researcher. Explain those here.

Summary

Use at least one paragraph to summarize this chapter.

CHAPTER IV - FINDINGS

Restate purpose of your study here with your research questions. In your second paragraph, introduce your findings. Note that findings are determined from your research questions, not your interview questions. If you conducted a pilot study, concisely report the results. Report any impact of the pilot study on the main study (for example, changes in instrumentation, data analysis strategies, etc.).

Qualitative studies can have a few as three themes or as many as five or six themes. In general, qualitative studies do not have themes that number in excess of nine or ten. Quantitative studies usually have two or more questions that guide the work herein.

Qualitative Findings

Description of Study Participants

Give a brief one to two sentence description of your participants. You want to include demographic information that is relevant to your study. For instance, if your study does not mention or is not related to the time period in which your participants were born (i.e. Baby Boomer, Generation X), then you should not include that notation here. Two examples in Level 3 headings are listed below. Note: Pseudonyms are used.

Example 1 - Participant One. Mary is a White second semester freshman enrolled at a public university in the southeastern region of the United States. She was involved with the xxxxxx program while in high school.

Example 2 - Participant Two. Kayla is an African American first semester freshman enrolled at a public university in the southeastern region of the United States. She was involved with xxxxx while in high school. Kayla is a first-generation college student.

Next, discuss themes. Themes are derived from your research questions, not your interview questions. They should be represented by the majority of your participants to meet the threshold of a theme. If you interviewed 10 persons, then you should be able to cite from at least six of their interviews to support your themes. Minor themes or sub-themes are also typically generated from the data. You can organize the themes according to your research questions. Here again you can get an idea of how to organize them from looking at similar dissertations. If your themes particularly resonate with your framework, you can note so here although further explication will occur in the next chapter.

Themes should be treated as proper nouns and written as such. Themes should also be discussed within the context of the literature although again, deeper explication occurs in the next chapter. When using quotes from participants to explain and justify themes, make sure they are cited according to APA guidelines (personal communication, date of interview). Sample headings are below.

Theme 1: XXXXXXXX

Subtheme: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

Subtheme: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

Theme 2: XXXXXXXX

Subtheme: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

Quantitative Findings

Data Collection

Describe the time frame for data collection as well as the actual recruitment and response rates. Present any discrepancies in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter III. Report baseline descriptive and demographic characteristics of the sample. Describe how representative the sample is of the population or how proportional it is to the larger population if non-probability sampling is used (external validity). Provide results of basic univariate analyses that justify inclusion of covariates in the model, if applicable.

Treatment or Intervention Fidelity

Describe whether the treatment was administered as planned and any challenges that prevented planned implementation as described in Chapter III. Describe any adverse events related to the intervention. Adverse events are those occurrences with serious consequences.

Results

Report descriptive statistics that appropriately characterize the sample. Evaluate statistical assumptions. Report statistical analysis findings, organized by research questions and hypotheses including: the exact statistics and associated probability values, confidence intervals around the statistics, effect sizes. Report results of post-hoc analyses of statistical tests. Report any additional statistical tests of hypotheses that emerged from

the analysis of the main hypotheses. Include tables and figures to illustrate results. Tables and figures most conform to APA formatting standards.

Synthesis and Summary

Summarize chapter findings here. This can be accomplished in one to two paragraphs at minimum. There is no recommended minimum length for this chapter.

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overview of Study

Restate the purpose of your study with your research questions. Next, restate the findings of your study with the themes and results. Finally, explain what will follow next.

Discussion

This is where you tie your problem, purpose, importance, and findings together. You essentially answer, “What does this mean and how does it extend existing research? What implications does your findings portend for social justice and transformative leadership? Be expansive as possible and discuss consistency or non-consistency with current literature. You should have a good three to four pages in this section. Be sure to show how the mixed design provided a deeper understanding and developed knowledge in a complimentary fashion.

Discussion of Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This section specifically addresses your findings in relation to your framework. How does your themes relate to your framework? Are they aligned in part or in whole? In what ways do they contrast with existing literature?

Implications for Teachers, Educational Leaders, and Policymakers

This section addresses implications for practitioners and decision-makers. Be as specific as possible and when appropriate, make connections to the existing literature. Try to have at least three substantive recommendations. Remember, all text in a dissertation should be in narrative form. This means the recommendations should not be numbered or bulleted.

Suggestions for Future Research

This section is for additional research. You may suggest different research designs such as longitudinal studies. You may suggest focus on different gender or racial/ethnic perspectives. Again, you have at least three to four substantive recommendations. Remember, all text in a dissertation should be in narrative form. This means the recommendations should not be numbered or bulleted.

Concluding Thoughts

This can also serve as your summary. Permit yourself to be more reflective here on your research, what it means to you and what you hope it means for educational leaders and educational leadership. Recommended minimum is one paragraph.

REFERENCES

- Irby, B., Lunenburg, F., Lara-Alecio, R., & Tong, F. (2015). Qualitative Critizue: A Heuristic Tool for Doctoral Students to Use in Improving their Research Skills. *Journal of Education and Literature*, 147-158.
- Simon, M., & Goes, J. (2013). Scope, limitations, and delimitations. *Dissertation and scholarly research: Recipes for success*. Seattle, WA: Dissertation Success LLC.

APPENDICES