

**TITLE IN ALL CAPS**

by

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**APPROVED BY:**

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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.). Since this is a quantitative study, language is consistent with *investigate* and *relationship between*. Each purpose should be stated in well-developed paragraphs that at minimum contain three to five sentences.

### **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 thorough understanding of 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.

State clearly and forthrightly which framework you are using. 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. List them as RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, etc. **Hypotheses are optional. Questions in Chapter 1 are optional but required in Chapter 3.**

## **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 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade or 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> 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. Your literature review should be between 25 and 50 pages. 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 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.

## **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 or faced (if your study involved an instrument) and how you will/did mitigate them.

### **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 securing institutional permissions (including IRB and other requisite entities), the informed consent process, strategies to prevent coercion, and any potential conflicts of interest. If

you are using archival data, describe the treatment of the data, that is whether the data are anonymous or confidential, and any concerns related to each. Also include protections for confidential data (data storage procedures, data dissemination, who will have access to the data, and when data will be destroyed).

Other relevant ethical issues that may need to be addressed involve explaining procedures followed if, for instance, you conducted the study in your work environment, conflict of interests and power differentials. Also, if you used incentives, that should be addressed here. 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 and hypotheses.

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.).

### **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 or 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.

### **Summary**

Provide transitional materials from the findings.

## CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### **Overview of Study**

Restate the purpose of your study with your research questions. Next, explain what will follow next. Make sure you have at minimum, three to five sentences for each paragraph.

### **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.

### **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.

## 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 delimiations. *Dissertation and scholarly research: Recipes for success*. Seattle, WA: Dissertation Success LLC.

**APPENDICES**