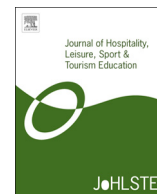


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## Pitfalls of tourism graduate students in presenting the ingredients of research proposals



Sutanto Leo

STP Bandung, Jl. Dr. Setianudhi no 186, Bandung, 40141, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the pitfalls of graduate students to present essential ingredients of research proposals. This case study examined twelve student research proposals. The collected data of the proposal ingredients were analyzed by organizing, comparing and interpreting the data. The findings indicate that students have problems to provide essential background information in the introduction, to present critical evaluation, to undertake a rigorous review, to include relevant research findings, to identify a research gap, and to describe a research design along with an adequate justification. In conclusion, the students have serious pitfalls in presenting certain ingredients of research proposal.

### 1. Introduction

One requirement of tourism graduate students to complete their study is to present a research proposal prior to completing their thesis or final project paper for defense examination. To gain an academic degree, it is a must for every student to write their research proposals. Research is a careful, scientific and systematic study achieved by searching for new facts in any branch of knowledge. [Leo \(2013\)](#) & [Kumar \(2011\)](#) define that research is a structured inquiry that uses an acceptable scientific methodology to collect, analyze, and interpret data to give problem solutions by answering questions to produce applicable new knowledge.

A research proposal is a plan to give sufficient information from beginning to end that the proposed research is worthwhile ([Leo, 2013](#); [Malik & Hamied, 2016](#), p. 283). This research plan is to interpret information, to solve problems or answer questions and to create new knowledge or resolve controversial existing knowledge ([Ash, 2011](#); [Kumar, 2011](#); [Leo, 2013 & 2017](#)). This information suggests that students should be able to design their research plan by providing sufficient information or ingredients in the research proposal. This plan helps students produce an acceptable research proposal by adhering to quality research standards to develop their potential and to build their identities and the reputation of their institutions.

A number of research studies have revealed that there are problems in various aspects of research proposals. Some students feel depressed while preparing their proposal and some have difficulties including the essential ingredients in writing proposals and fall into plagiarism ([Leo, 2013 & 2017](#)). [Kikula and Qorro \(2007\)](#) and [Wong \(2014\)](#) specify that the most common problems include: stating the research problem; articulating the importance of the research problem and proposing an appropriate methodology; lacking organisation and structure; lacking focus, unity and coherence; being repetitive, wordy and verbose; failing to cite influential papers; failing to keep up with recent developments; failing to critically evaluate cited papers; citing irrelevant or trivial references; and depending too much on secondary sources.

Similarly, [Wong \(2014\)](#) points out common mistakes in presenting thesis proposal ingredients such as: a) failure to provide the proper context to frame the research question; b) failure to delimit the boundary conditions for your research; c) failure to cite

E-mail addresses: [sutanto.leo26@gmail.com](mailto:sutanto.leo26@gmail.com), [sut@stp-bandung.ac.id](mailto:sut@stp-bandung.ac.id).

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landmark studies; d) failure to accurately present the theoretical and empirical contributions by other researchers; e) failure to stay focused on the research question; f) failure to develop a coherent and persuasive argument for the proposed research; g) too much detail on minor issues, but not enough detail on major issues; h) too much rambling – going "all over the map" without a clear sense of direction There are also: a) problem to know and speak convincingly in presenting the proposal; b) problem to recognize and adopt a style of writing appropriate to the genre or c) problem to give as much due diligence to the communication of one's research concepts as one gives to the concepts themselves (Lemanski, 2014).

A number of recent studies have investigated research proposals. Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah (2014) examined the ingredients of a good thesis and dissertation research proposal for students of higher education. Lemanski (2014) investigated research proposals that cause continual problems for students as researchers. Honga & Fong (2012) examined the expectations of examiners in a research proposal presentation focusing on the main aspects of presenting a research proposal. Borrett, Sampson, and Cavoukian (2016) inspected ethics in designing a research proposal collaboratively. Osaba et al. (2017) examined a good research proposal focusing on a step by step process to introduce new approaches and findings in the scope of routing problems. Annersten and Wredling (2006) explored stages of a research proposal following the common steps of proposal writing that include research background based on current theories, research questions to be answered and the objectives of the research, explanation about the method and its justification, the budget proposed and the time line of research.

In all of the studies above, research proposals have been investigated from different points of views. This study investigated another point of view to gain understanding and knowledge about the ingredients of acceptable research proposals. The purpose of this study is to examine the pitfalls of tourism graduate students in presenting ingredients of three main dimensions of the research proposal that cover introduction, review of literature and methods.

## 2. Structure of research proposal

A research proposal contains a research topic, table of contents: to give an overview of the scale and anticipated organisation of the proposal, an introduction: to give background and create a research space, a literature review: to show that the students are familiar with previous research and opinion on the topic and understand their relevance to the study being planned, a methodology: to describe how research will be conducted, and how the data will be collected and analyzed, references: to provide detailed works cited and references, and appendices: to provide instruments and schedules of the research (Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014; Leo, 2013 & 2017; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Osaba et al., 2017). However in this study, introduction, review of literature and methods of research proposal become the focus of examination as proposal assessment is mainly based on these three dimensions. This is in line with the school guide book in writing a thesis that includes writing a thesis proposal and a proposal assessment form (STPB, 2017). The selection of the three dimensions is to convince that the proposal is worthwhile.

The introduction states the key points of the research expanded in the background information. Sufficient background information helps readers find out that a researcher has a basic understanding of the research problem being investigated and promotes confidence in the overall quality of the analysis and findings. This information gives the readers the essential context needed to understand the research problem and its significance. The review of literature combines both summary and synthesis of key sources and indicates the researcher's understanding of the research problem being studied. The methods section of a research proposal provides a clear and precise information of how the research was carried and the rationale for why specific procedures were chosen. It describes what and how to answer the research, justify the design, and explain how the results were analyzed.

## 3. Ingredients of introduction

Introduction is a window to give overall impression about the research plan to the readers (Clare & Hamilton, 2003). It is to introduce the topic of the research, to give a general background of the topic, to indicate the overall plan of the research, to arouse reader's interest in the topic (Leo, 2013 & 2017; Emilia, 2008; Clare, 2003). The functions of introduction are to show context, significance, research questions, and issues being studied in the research; to bring readers to the organisation of the thesis; to explain how the research questions and issues being studied in the research appear; to explain the scope of the research; to identify the gap or space of the study; and to sign how to fill in the available gap (Swales & Feak, 1994; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Leo, 2013 & 2017). Students' problems of presenting the ingredients of introduction can be indicated in the research background, research questions, objectives and significance of the research.

### 3.1. Research background

Research background explains the area of the enquiry to solidify the context of the problems. It reviews issues on the topic based on recent developments in the literature including findings of recent studies (Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014). The importance and problems of research are supported by existing information, observation data, data of preliminary interview or pre-survey before the research is conducted (Leo, 2013 & 2017). Research background needs to be "systematic, explicit, and reproducible method of identifying, evaluating, and synthesising the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners" (Fink, 2005).

As research is to address present problems that have not been investigated, it is important to provide a sufficient context for the investigation by indicating research gap. A good research gap has the following criteria: a) A good conceptual arrangement, but it is not proven empirically yet; b) Research issues that have not been successfully answered or hypothesis that has not been proven; c)

Findings of similar research that are controversial; d) Results of study that leave weaknesses or suggestions for further research; e) Having the same independent (X) variable as some previous studies but the dependent (Y) variable is different; and f) Having the same research variables as the previous studies but the research method used is different (Ferdinand, 2011; Leo, 2017; Sanusi, 2012).

### 3.2. Research questions

The research question, problem statement or hypothesis is a part of the introduction in a research proposal. Leo (2017) states that research question, problem statement and hypothesis have the same function or position. If a researcher uses research questions, it is not necessary to use a problem statement and hypothesis. A research question is in the form of question (interrogative?) and problem statement is in the form of statement. Both of them have the same content.

A hypothesis and proposition refer to the formulation of the possible answers to a specific scientific question. A hypothesis is a statement made by the researchers when they speculate on the results of the research or experiment that must be empirically proven. A hypothesis is used in quantitative research based on correlation between two research variables or more; or influence of an independent variable on a dependent variable. A proposition is a statement that explains the truth or states the difference or relationship between two concepts or more in qualitative research that has been justified by an empirical and meticulous test (Leo, 2013 & 2017).

### 3.3. Research objectives

The objectives of research are always set after formulating good research questions. They are to explain how the research questions are going to be answered or the way in which the researchers find answers to research questions. Thus the number of research objectives equal the number of research questions. The authors need to double-check to make sure that there are not more or fewer research objectives than the prescribed research questions (Leo, 2013 & 2017).

### 3.4. Research significance

Significance of research is indicated by stating theoretical and practical significances (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Theoretically, the research is to deepen the researcher's understanding on the theories used. For postgraduate students, they have courage to challenge theories or even to build a new theory. Practically, the findings of the research are able to give practical contributions to policy, people, community, industry, institution, organisation or locus of the research (Leo, 2013 & 2017). Further Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah (2014) mention that research significance is to justify the need for the investigation based on references to find out the gap of the research, to identify research problems or research questions, and to explain how the results of the research proposed will give contribution to the existing body of knowledge and will benefit academicians, education, practitioners, community, and government.

## 4. Ingredients of literature review

A literature review is “about making references to the works of other people either in a descriptive or critical and analytical manner” (Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014). The purpose is to offer an overview of significant literature published on a specific topic, issue, research method, theory or to provide a justification of the proposed research project, indicating how it will be different to those which have been published and to develop an argument or a case for the study (Afolabi, 1992; Thody, 2006). Further, the function of a literature review is: a) to preview research studies that have been done by previous researchers; b) to summarize and synthesize the literature or to describe the relation among one another's; c) to critique the literature by discussing the pros and cons of the theories; d) to improve the methodology of the investigation, e) to identify the contribution to the existing body of knowledge and to bring the findings of the research to the context (Kumar, 2011; Booth, Papaioannou, & Sutton, 2012; Machi, 2009; Murray, 2002; Lipman, 2003; Cooper, 2010; Wong, 2014).

A review of literature can be divided into two main parts: coverage and synthesis. The coverage of a literature review is to show that the researcher is familiar with the major trends of the research area recently and opinion on the topic that includes: justification of criteria for the inclusion and exclusion from the review, essential description, focused topic, mostly indication of main current sources on the topic, and the presentation of major finding on the research topic, and by whom and when the studies are conducted (Burton, 2002). The synthesis of literature is to show that the researcher understands the relevance of the topic and previous current studies. The research topic is analyzed based on justification of the correlation between the present study and the main findings of current research studies (Hart, 1998; Feak and Swales, 2009).

Based on the above discussion, the essential ingredients of literature review of a good proposal in this study refer to: a) a synthesis of research literature; b) a critical evaluation of the relevant issues; c) a presentation of current research major findings; d) clarity, rigor, breadth and depth of the review; and e) identification of a gap within the literature.

## 5. Ingredients of research methodology

Research methodology is an important component where the author makes explicitly clear the rationale for selecting the particular methodology. The ingredients of research methodology include research design, a restatement of research questions or hypothesis, population and sampling for quantitative, sampling and research participants or informants for qualitative research, data

collection techniques, data analysis techniques and schedule or research agenda. (Mauch & Park, 2003, p. 107; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Leo, 2017).

### 5.1. Research design

In quantitative design, researcher formulates a hypothesis, collects data in an investigation of the problem, and then uses the data from the investigation, after analysis is made and conclusions are shared, to prove the hypotheses not false or false (Creswell, 2009). In qualitative design, the researcher formulates research questions and procedures, collects data typically in the participant's setting, analyses data inductively building from particulars to general themes, and makes interpretations of the meaning of the data and finally writes reports with a flexible structure (Creswell, 2009 & 2013). For the mixed methods research design, the researcher combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches, involves the use or mixing of both approaches, collects and analyzes both kinds of data in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell, 2009).

### 5.2. Restatement of research questions

Restatement of research questions or a hypothesis is required to ensure that the research procedure is to answer the research questions or to prove the hypothesis (only in quantitative research). Research questions are to help the researcher focus on the questions to be answered and direct the researcher not to go away from the questions or answer something which is not questioned (Leo, 2017).

### 5.3. Population and sampling

A research population is a large collection of people or objects that become the focus of a scientific investigation of organisation, community, condition or situation. An investigation is often restricted to certain samples representing the population because a random sampling are usually for quantitative research methods, while purposive sampling is for qualitative research methods.

### 5.4. Data collection method

Quantitative data collection methods explain how the data was collected or instruments were used, the types and sources of data. These methods rely on random sampling and structured data collection instruments such as closed ended interview guidelines, observation checklists, questionnaires, scales, and physiological measurement (Gay et al., 2006; Creswell, 2009, 2013). Qualitative data collection methods play an important role in providing deep information about the phenomena that involves direct interaction with individuals on a one to one basis. These methods rely on purposive sampling and data collection methods such as open ended interviews, observation, and document analysis.

### 5.5. Data analysis techniques

Data Analysis is a systematic process of evaluating quantifiable data applying analytical or logical techniques to examine each component of the data already collected. Quantitative data normally deals with numbers and things that are measured objectively such as height, width, and length, temperature and humidity, prices, area and volume. Quantitative data can be analyzed in various different ways such as using descriptive statistics, Spearman rank correlation test, Pearson correlation, T-test, analysis of variables (Annova), Chi-square, multiple regression analysis, etc.

Qualitative data analysis is a process that involves messy data reduction and makes sense of vast amounts of information, often from different sources in order to give impressions and to shed some light on research problems (Gay et al., 2006; Creswell, 2009, 2013). The goal of data analysis is to analytically reduce data by producing summaries, abstracts, coding, and memos (codes, categories, and their relationships), to draw conclusions and to test their validity. This analysis is an iterative and ongoing process. In other words, the qualitative data is analyzed through stages such as reducing data, organizing or coding, comparing and interpreting.

### 5.6. Research objectives

The paper focusses on the pitfalls of tourism graduate students in presenting the essential ingredients of research proposals. The objectives of the study are: a) to investigate students' pitfalls in presenting ingredients of introduction; b) to find out the students' pitfalls in presenting ingredients of literature review; and c) to investigate students' pitfalls in presenting ingredients of methodology.

## 6. Methods

The study was conducted in a research methodology course at four tourism schools of higher education in Bandung, Bali, Medan, and Makassar. These state schools belong to the best tourism schools and have become the models of tourism schools in those four areas in Indonesia. The research methodology course is a compulsory subject offered to semester eight graduate students of S1 and Diploma IV degrees that require a four-year course. In research methodology that includes statistics, students need to write research

proposal individually to be presented in a seminar.

In the seminar, proposals were assessed by two evaluators and the assessment focused on how the ingredients of introduction, review of literature and methods were presented. These three dimensions of research proposal showed whether their research plan is worthwhile. Those who passed the seminar were able to continue their research by revising the proposals based on evaluators' comments. After revising the proposal and being approved by the evaluators, students submitted the final proposals to their study programs. This whole process was important to ensure the quality of their research proposals which were used as main documents for this study.

The data collected was based on twelve (12) student final proposals which were selected as purposive samples to meet criteria for inclusion and were retained for analysis. The twelve students belonged to average students in their classes. These twelve proposals were collected by permission from the four tourism schools and were evaluated one by one to find how the ingredients of introduction, review of literature and methods were written.

The analysis of research proposal ingredients was carried out by the researcher alone to ensure the depth and consistency. The data of the 12 proposals were reduced by selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appeared in transcriptions in order to see what is important. Then, the data were grouped or coded into the categories of ingredients that cover introduction, review of literature and methods. To build a sense of the data, coded data were compared within and across transcripts and across dimensions deemed important to the study. Finally, the data was interpreted by recreating the prominent codes and categories in a manner that shows the relationships and insights derived in the comparison phase and that explains them more broadly in light of existing knowledge and theoretical perspectives.

## 7. Findings and discussions

The data of findings were collected from the 12 student research proposals by identifying the contents of introduction, review of literature and methodology. The contents of each proposal varied in terms of the coverage but were reduced to focus on the presence of ingredients. Then, the ingredients were classified, coded and presented into three tables of data referring to the three research objectives in this study: a) To examine the students' pitfalls in presenting ingredients of the introduction; b) To investigate the students' pitfalls in presenting the ingredients of the literature review; and c) To find out the students' pitfalls in presenting the ingredients of the methodology.

The findings of the introduction based on how the ingredients were presented in the proposals are shown in [Table 1](#). The discussions of the findings of introduction appear directly under [Table 1](#). The results of how students present literature ingredients are shown in [Table 2](#). Right after [Table 2](#), the discussions of literature findings are presented. The findings of methodology ingredients found in the proposals are indicated in [Table 3](#) and the findings are discussed underneath.

### 7.1. Findings of introduction ingredients

[Table 1](#) shows the findings of introduction ingredients. The pitfalls of students in presenting essential ingredients are indicated by the four main ingredients of introduction that include research background, research questions, research objectives, and significance of research.

### 7.2. Discussion of introduction ingredients

Based on the above findings, the pitfalls of students in presenting the introduction appear to be various. Most students (student numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10) fail to provide sufficient background of the research. They are not able to provide research context and rationale of the study. They fail to state the research problem, to show the purpose of the research and to provide the context and to set the stage for the research question in such a way as to show its necessity and importance. It means that they fail to explain what previous researchers state about the topic and to discuss recent developments on the topic (<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244014548178> Naoum, 2013; Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014). This is the most common problem for the students in stating the research problem and articulating the importance of the research (Wong, 2014).

Only a few students (student numbers 7, 11, & 12) succeeded in providing research context and rationale of the proposed study. These students were able to introduce brief burning issues (the importance and problems) of the research, to arouse the reader's interest, to inform the organisation of the research study and to state the importance of the research (Mauch & Park, 2003, p. 108; Leo, 2013); to make claims for the centrality or significance of the research in question and to outline the overall argument of the thesis (Swales & Feak, 1994, p. 174).

Regarding the formulation of research questions, almost all students (student numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12) indicated to have well formulated research questions relevant to the research variables. They were able to identify the key independent and dependent variables of the study and to specify the phenomenon to be investigated. It shows that the students as researchers were familiar with the topic area and with the space in the current issues (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007, pp. 83–84). The research questions establish a framework for the research that make readers understand how it is related to other studies (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 96).

Students 3 and 10 were partly able to indicate that they have problems formulating research questions relevant with the variables of the research topic. Only one of the three students was completely unable to formulate research questions. This is what Wong (2014) points out as the common mistakes in presenting thesis proposal ingredients to provide the proper context to frame the research questions and to establish a framework for the research (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 96); As for the research objectives, more than

**Table 1**  
Findings of Introduction Ingredients. Sample of document: 12 student research proposals.

Std	Research Background	Research Questions	Research Objectives	Significance of Research
1.	Lack of focus on the research topic. No gap.	Research questions focus on the research variables.	Good relevant research objectives.	The significance of the research is indicated.
2.	No burning issues. No research gap nor problem.	The research questions are well formulated.	Sufficient research objectives.	The significance of the research is well shown.
3.	Too general, no burning issues, no research gap.	One research question is overlapping with another.	Two objectives are fine. One research objective is overlapping with another.	The significance of the research is well indicated.
4.	Limited relevant references. No burning issues, and no rational of the proposed study.	Three research questions are well formulated. But one is overlapping with another.	Two objectives are fine. One is overlapping with another research objective.	The significance of the research is shown both theoretically and practically.
5.	Fail to present rational of the proposed study and to set the stage for research questions.	The research questions are well formulated and focus on the research variables.	The research objectives are discussed clearly referring to the research questions.	The significance of the research is relevant with the research topic.
6.	Fail to provide the research context and the rational of the proposed study. No gap.	Research questions not relevant with the variables of the research.	The research objectives follow the irrelevant research questions.	The significance of the research is indicated but irrelevant with the topic.
7.	The background provides research context & shows rational of proposed study.	The research questions are well formulated & relevant with the research variables.	The research objectives follow the research questions formulated.	The significance of the research is indicated sufficiently.
8.	Fail to provide research context, and rational of the proposed study. No gap.	The research questions are well formulated & relevant with the research variables.	The research objectives are relevant with the research questions.	The significance of the research is indicated clearly.
9.	Fail to provide research context, and rational of the proposed study. No gap.	It formulates research questions reflecting the title of the research.	The research objective reflect the title of the research.	The practical significance is indicated but not the theoretical significance.
10.	Fail to provide research context, and rational of the proposed study. No gap.	Two research questions are not relevant. One question is restating the research title.	The research objectives do not reflect objectives of the research as a whole.	Both theoretical and practical significance of the research are indicated.
11.	Succeed to provide research context and rational of the proposed study. No gap.	The research questions are well formulated and relevant with the research variable.	The research objectives reflect objectives of the research as a whole.	Both theoretical and practical significance of the research are indicated.
12.	Succeed to provide research context and rational of the proposed study. No gap.	The research questions are well formulated and relevant with the research variable.	The research objectives reflect objectives of the research as a whole.	Both theoretical and practical significance of the research are indicated.

**Table 2**  
Findings of Literature Review Ingredients Sample of document: 12 student research proposals.

Std	Synthesis of research literature	Critical evaluation of the relevant issues	Presentation of current major research findings	Clarity, rigor, breadth and depth of the review	Identification of a gap within the literature
1.	The research literature is well synthesized.	No critical evaluation of the relevant issues.	Current research findings are very limited.	The review is not rigorous, not broad and not deep.	There is no gap within the literature.
2.	Poorly synthesized review. Not focus on the research variable.	No critical evaluation. Review less relevant issues.	Current major findings are not well presented.	No rigorous and deep review with limited references.	Gap is not indicated in the literature review.
3.	Well synthesized but one research variable theories are not reviewed.	No critical evaluation of the issues but relevant with the issues.	Current major research findings are not presented.	The review is clear and rigorous but it lacks breath and depth.	Gap is indicated in the literature review.
4.	Poorly synthesized, not focus on the research variables.	Fails to discuss recent issues. No critical evaluation.	Current major research findings are not presented.	The literature review is neither clear nor deep.	No identification of a gap within the literature.
5.	Well synthesized focus on the research variables.	Relevant issues but no critical evaluation.	No current major research findings.	The literature review is clear but not deep.	No gap within the literature.
6.	Not well synthesized & not focus on the research variables.	Relevant but no critical evaluation of the issues.	No presentation of current major research findings.	No clarity, rigor, breadth and depth.	No identification of a gap within the literature.
7.	Well synthesized and focus on the research variables.	Relevant issues with critical evaluation.	Current major research findings are presented.	Clear, rigorous, broad and deep review.	There is a gap within the literature.
8.	Poorly synthesized & not focus on the research variables.	Less relevant issues & no critical evaluation.	Current major research findings are presented.	No clarity, rigor, breadth and depth of the research.	No identification of a gap within the literature.
9.	Not well synthesized & not focus on the research variables.	Partly relevant.	Very limited current major research findings.	Almost no clarity, rigor, breadth and depth of review.	There is no gap within the literature/
10.	Poorly synthesized and partly focus on research variables.	Partly relevant but no critical evaluation.	Current major research findings are very limited.	Partly clear, rigorous, broad and deep review.	No identification of a gap within the literature.
11.	Well synthesized and good understanding of research problem.	Relevant issues with critical evaluation of the issues.	Current major research findings are well indicated.	Fully indicates clarity, rigor, breadth and depth.	There is a gap within the literature.
12.	Well synthesized and sufficient understanding of research problem.	Relevant issues with critical evaluation of the issues.	Current major research findings are well indicated.	Clear, rigorous, broad and deep review.	A gap within the literature is clearly indicated.

**Table 3**  
Findings of Research Methodology Ingredients Sample of document: 12 student research proposals.

Std	Research Design	Restatement of research questions	Population and Sampling	Data Collection Methods	Data Analysis Technique
1	Quantitative and qualitative designs are discussed sufficiently.	The research questions indicated clearly.	No information about population and sampling.	Clear method. No types and sources of data. No instruments.	No information how to analyze the qualitative data.
2	Clear design.No justification of using this research design.	No restatement, only showing the locus.	No information about population and sampling.	Clear method. No types and sources of data. No instruments.	No information about the techniques.
3	Clear design. No justification of using the design.	It only mentions the locus but restatement.	Population & sampling discussed with no samples.	Clear method. No types and sources of data. No instruments.	Clear information how the data will be analyzed.
4	Clear design with justification of using the design.	It mentions the locus and objects to be investigated clearly.	Population samples are well discussed.	Well discussed with validity and reliability tests.	Clear information how the data will be analyzed.
5	Sufficient design. with explanation of choosing the design.	Clearly indicated objects & locus of the research.	Population samples are well discussed.	Well discussed with validity and reliability tests.	Clear information how the data will be analyzed.
6	Sufficient research design with no justification.	There is no research question restatement & no locus.	Well discussed methods. No number of samples.	The methods are discussed with no data type & source.	Some information about analysis for qualitative data.
7	Sufficient design with explanation for choosing the design.	No information about research questions & object.	Population & sampling are not indicated.	Clear method with information about the kind data & source.	The data analysis technique explains how the data will be analyzed clearly.
8	Sufficient design. No explanation for choosing the design.	No information about research questions but the locus only.	Population and sampling are discussed. No information about the sample.	All methods are mentioned. No type of data & source information.	No information about data analysis technique.
9	Mixed methods with no information for the designs.	No information about research questions but the locus.	No population and sampling information.	Mixed methods with source of information.	Enough information how to analyze the data.
10	Qualitative design. No explanation why this qualitative design is chosen.	No information about research questions but the locus.	Clear population and sampling. No sample information.	Qualitative method with source of information.	Clear information how to analyze the data.
11	The research design is explained sufficiently.	Research questions are restated and locus is indicated clearly.	Clear population, sampling & sample.	Clear instruments with are source and the types of data.	Well explained data analysis technique.
12	The research design is explained sufficiently.	Clear information about research questions and locus.	Clear population, sampling & sample.	Clear instruments with are source and the types of data.	Well explained data analysis technique.



half of the students (student numbers 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 11 and 12) were able to formulate research objectives that reflect objectives of the research as a whole, and student numbers 3, 4, 9 were almost able to present research objectives expected. These students were able to show the research questions going to be answered or the way in which they find answers to research questions. The number of research objectives indicated are equal to the number of research questions (Leo, 2013 & 2017). Only two students (student numbers 6 and 10) fail to formulate research objectives that reflect objectives of the research as a whole. They fail to provide the proper context to frame the research questions and to establish a framework for the research (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 96; Wong, 2014).

Lastly, in regard with the significance of research, all students were able to present this ingredient properly. This theoretical significance is shown that the research is to deepen the researcher's understanding on the theories used and the practical significance indicates that the findings of the research is able to give practical contributions to students, industry and institution, where the research is done (Gay et al., 2006; Leo, 2013 & 2017). They are also able to justify the need for the investigation based on references and to explain how the results of the research proposed will give contribution to the existing body of knowledge and will benefit academicians, education, practitioners, community, and government (Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014).

In summary, all students were able to present most of the ingredients of the introduction chapter such as formulating research questions, deciding research objectives and indicating the significance of the research. These aspects are crucial for a research proposal. The pitfall of the students was the failure to indicate the background of the research. They were not able to provide research context and rationale of the proposed study including the research gap.

## 8. The findings of literature review ingredients

Table 2 shows the findings of literature review ingredients from the 12 student research proposals. The pitfalls of students in presenting essential ingredients are indicated by the five main ingredients of literature review that include: synthesis of research literature, critical evaluation of the relevant issues, presentation of current major research findings, clarity, rigor, breadth and depth of the review, and identification of a gap within the literature.

Based on the research results stated in Table 2, the pitfalls of students in presenting the literature review show variety in terms of: synthesis of research literature, critical evaluation of the relevant issues, presentation of current major research findings, clarity, rigor, breadth and depth of the review, and identification of a gap within the literature.

In regard with synthesis of the research literature, some students (student numbers 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, and 12) were able to present a well synthesized literature review and to provide sufficient understanding of the research problem. They succeed in previewing or putting together research studies that have been done by previous researchers and to summarize issues and to describe the relation among them (Machi, 2009; Thody, 2006; Murray, 2002, p. 113; Lipman, 2003; Cooper, 2010). They indicated that they are confident to provide the groundwork for the investigation and understand the theories and research issues connected with the research question but not to reinvent the wheel (Wong, 2014).

Some other students (student numbers 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10) had difficulties to synthesize literature and to provide sufficient understanding of the research problem. This means that they are not able to understand the research problem to be investigated and to integrate and synthesize the existing literature, theories or the research issues related to the research questions (Wong, 2014).

With the reference to critical evaluation of the relevant issues, few students (student numbers 7, 11, 12) provided this ingredient sufficiently. They were able to provide a justification of the proposed research project, to indicate how it is different from what has been published and to develop an argument for study based on the literature reviewed (Thody, 2006) or to criticize literature by showing the pros and cons among the theories (Machi, 2009; Thody, 2006; Murray, 2002, p. 113; Lipman, 2003; Cooper, 2010). Two other students (students number 9 and 10) provide a part of evaluation that criticizes relevant issues.

More than half students (student numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8) did not include a critical evaluation of the relevant information from current issues. They failed to provide a justification of the proposed investigation, to show the different issues that have been published and to develop an argument based on the literature reviewed (Thody, 2006) and to criticize literature by indicating arguments the pros and cons, the strengths and weaknesses of the issues (Wong, 2014; Machi, 2009; Thody, 2006; Murray, 2002, p. 113; Lipman, 2003; Cooper, 2010).

In connection with presentation of current major research findings, one third of students (student numbers 7, 8, 11, 12) were familiar with the major trends of the current research area and were able to present major findings on the research topic, and by whom and when the studies are conducted (Burton, 2002, Fraenkel and dan Wallen, 2008). They are also able to justify the correlation between the present study going to be investigated and the main findings of current research studies (Hart, 1998, Feak and Swales, 2009).

Two-thirds of students (student numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10) had problems to indicate the current research findings in the review of literature of their proposals. Their references are mostly books that contain no current research findings. They are not able to establish the connection between what is going to be investigated and what has already been investigated, to indicate how the research findings are going to give contributions to the existing body of knowledge and to bring the findings of the research to the context (Kumar, 2011; Booth et al., 2012; and Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014).

In line with the clarity, rigor, breadth and depth of the review, few students (student numbers 7, 11, 12) were able to indicate a clear, rigorous, broad and deep review of literature. They understood to present the current issues of the topic going to be investigated, to focus on the research problem, and to show clarity (Kumar, 2011; Booth et al., 2012; Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014). They know and speak convincingly in presenting a proposal, adopt a style of writing appropriate to the genre and to give as much review due diligence to the communication of one's research concepts as one gives to the concepts themselves (Lemanski, 2014). One fourth students (student numbers 3, 5, and 10) indicate clarity, rigor, breadth and depth of literature review only partly. In other

words, they present an inadequate literature review.

Half of students (students numbers 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9) failed to present a clear, rigorous, broad and deep review. The failures to present the ingredients sufficiently or inadequate literature review (Kikula & Qorro, 2007) are in line with the statements of Wong (2014) that include: a) failure to provide the proper context to frame the research question; b) failure to delimit the boundary conditions for your research; c) failure to cite landmark studies; d) failure to accurately present the theoretical and empirical contributions by other researchers; e) failure to stay focused on the research question; f) failure to develop a coherent and persuasive argument for the proposed research; g) too much detail on minor issues, but not enough detail on major issues; h) too much rambling – going "all over the map" without a clear sense of direction.

Finally in regard to identification of a gap within the literature, one third of students (student numbers 3, 7, 11, 12) succeed in presenting a gap within the literature clearly. These students are able to identify a gap from the current research studies and to occupy the gap of the research (Machi, 2009; Todhy, 2006; Murray, 2002, p. 113; Lipman, 2003; Cooper, 2010) or to indicate what research still needs to be done or a gap of the research that the study will aim to fill, to convince arguments that make a major contribution to the understanding and development of the scope of the studies being investigated (Leo, 2013 & 2017).

Unfortunately, two-thirds of students (students numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10) failed to identify and present a gap within the current issues in the literature. They were not able to convince readers that their research will contribute significantly and substantially by solving debatable issues or filling a major gap in the issues (Wong, 2014). This failure indicates that students misunderstand the scope of the investigation being conducted.

In summary, half of the students were able to present a critical evaluation of the relevant information from current issues. They were successful in indicating a clear, rigorous, broad and deep review. However, two-thirds of students have pitfalls to indicate the current research findings in the review of literature of their proposals. The other pitfalls of these students were on identifying and presenting a gap within the current issues in literature.

### 8.1. Findings of research methodology ingredients

Table 3 shows the findings of research methodology ingredients from the 12 student research proposals. The pitfalls of students in presenting essential ingredients are indicated by the five main ingredients of research methodology that include: research design, research questions, population and sampling, data collection method, and data analysis technique.

Based on the research findings in Table 3, the pitfalls of students in presenting research methodology ingredients indicate pitfalls differently in terms of the five main ingredients of research methodology that include: research design, research object, population and sampling, data collection method, and data analysis technique.

First in terms of research design, half of the students (student numbers 1, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12) are able to present a sufficient research design. They are successful in articulating the importance of the research problem and proposing appropriate methods (Kikula & Qorro, 2007; Wong, 2014). They understand and choose a suitable type of research design for the proposed research, know the procedure sufficiently well and provide justification or reasons why the design is used (Mauch & Park, 2003, p. 107). The other half of students (student numbers 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10) indicate that they are able to present research design without any justification. These students only understand research design partly and they do not know the reasons for using the design.

Next in connection with restatement of research questions or hypothesis, less than half of students (student numbers 1, 4, 5, 11, 12) were able to present clear research questions and locus of the research. The restatement of the research questions or hypotheses is important to indicate specific questions to be answered or hypothesis to be proven. These students succeed in helping themselves focus on the questions to be answered and direct them not to go away from the questions (Leo, 2017). Other students (student numbers 2, 3, 8, 9, 10) mention the locus or research without restating the research questions. The other two students (student numbers 6 & 7) do not indicate either research questions or locus of the study.

Then in regard with the population and sampling, few students or one third students (student numbers 4, 5, 11, 12) are able to present the population, sampling and sample sufficiently. One third of students (student numbers 3, 6, 8, 10) are successful in indicating population and sampling clearly but provide no sample. One third of students (student numbers 1, 2, 7, 9) do not present population nor sampling. These phenomena means that one-third of students succeed in identifying a group of the whole objects that exist within a specific area, place, organisation, community, condition or situation (Gay et al., 2006; Creswell, 2009 & 2013; Leo, 2013 & 2017). The other one third of students also succeed to present population and sampling although they mis-present the number of samples. The last one third students fail to present both population and sampling.

In terms of data collection method, more than half of the students (student numbers 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12) are able to provide method with sources of information sufficiently. Less than half of students (student numbers 1, 2, 3, 6, 8) present clear methods but do not indicate the types and sources of data. These findings indicate that all students are successful in explaining methods or instruments used to collect both primary and secondary data, the sources and the types of the data connected with research variables for quantitative or qualitative research (Gay et al., 2006; Creswell, 2009 & 2013). Unfortunately, less than half of the students are not able to present the sources and types of data.

Lastly in relation with data analysis, two third of the students (student numbers 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12) sufficiently present data analysis techniques while one third of the students (student numbers 1, 2, 6, 8) do not indicate the analysis techniques. The two thirds or most students are able to indicate their understanding how to analyze quantifiable data applying analytical or logical techniques to examine each component of the data already collected and to analyze messy data that involves reduction to make sense of vast amounts of information from different sources in order to give impressions and to shed some light on research problems (Gay et al., 2006; Creswell, 2009 & 2013). It is a pity that one third students fail to indicate their knowledge to analyze either quantitative or

qualitative data.

The pitfalls of the graduate students in presenting the research proposal ingredients in the introduction, review of literature, and methodology indicate failures in teaching the research methodology course. The less focus of teaching on the ingredients of research proposals and less exposure of good research proposals to the students may become the main reason for the students' failure. These pitfalls are able to make students and research methodology lecturers aware of their problems that have to be anticipated and to be a lesson for the future focus of research methodology course.

From the above discussion about the methodology chapter, most students are able to fulfill the ingredients of the methodology chapter. It means that they are successful to present the whole ingredients of methodology chapter that include research design, research questions, population and sampling, data collection methods and data analysis technique. Some students have slight pitfalls on research design ingredient.

In summary, the students' pitfalls in presenting the ingredients of introduction, review of literature and methodology chapters are as follow. In the introduction chapter, the pitfalls of most students were to present the background information. They were not able to provide the context, to indicate the research problem, and to show the importance of the study and rationale of the proposed study including the research gap. They failed to explain what earlier researchers discussed about the present study (Naoum, 2013; Wong, 2014). Less than half of the students were not successful in formulating the objectives of the research, They were not able to show how the research questions were going to be answered through the study being investigated.

In the review of literature, half of the students' pitfalls were to present synthesis of the literature, summarize of the issues, and to give explanation the relation among the theories. These students were unsuccessful in providing the groundwork for the investigation, to understand the theories and issues connected with the research, and to integrate or synthesize the theories or issues related to the research questions. More than half of the students failed to indicate critical evaluation of the research issues such as the pros and cons, the strengths and weaknesses of recent literature (Thody, 2006; Cooper, 2010, & Wong, 2014). Two-thirds of them were not familiar with the current trends of the issues on their research topics. They failed to provide justification about the correlation between their present study and the findings of the current studies, to indicate how their research findings were going to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge and bring their research findings to the research context.

Next, the pitfalls of half of the students in presenting the ingredients of the literature were to indicate clear, rigorous and broad literature. They failed to present current issues and to focus on the research problems being investigated. In other words, they presented an inadequate review of literature (Kikula & Qorro, 2007). The other pitfall of two-thirds students was in presenting a gap from the current research studies and to occupy the gap of the research. They were unsuccessful in indicating what gap still needed to be investigated and to provide convincing arguments that contribute to the understanding and development of the present study being investigated. They misunderstood the scope of their investigation.

In the methodology chapter, more than half of the students were unsuccessful in presenting restatement of research questions or hypothesis. They failed to indicate specific questions to be answered and hypothesis to be proven (Leo, 2017). The research questions and hypothesis are important to direct them and to focus on the study being conducted. The next pitfall, two-thirds of students were not able to discuss the population, sampling technique and samples sufficiently well. These students failed to identify the group of the whole objects that existed within the specific area, locus or the place of investigation.

## 9. Conclusion

The results of the present study showed that students' pitfalls in presenting the ingredients of a research proposal needs special attention from students, proposal evaluators, methodology course lecturers, and institutions. It is important because a research proposal is a plan to convince examiners that the proposed research is worthwhile. The pitfalls of students are influenced by whole factors involved in writing proposals. In this study, the pitfalls of tourism graduate students in presenting the ingredients of research proposals were found in introduction, literature review and methodology chapters. In the introduction, out of the four ingredients, most students fail to provide sufficient background information. In the literature review, more than half of the students are not able to present critical evaluation of the relevant information from current issues. Half of students fail to indicate a clear, rigorous, broad and deep review. Two-thirds of students have pitfalls to find and indicate the current research findings in the review of literature of their proposals. Two-thirds of students are not successful in identifying and presenting a gap within the current issues in the literature. In regard with the methodology, more than half of the students do not restate the research questions and two-thirds of the students do not give sufficient information about the population and sampling.

Based on the pitfalls of the graduate students in presenting the ingredients of research proposals, it is recommended that research methodology should focus more on preparing students to write research proposals and expose them to the samples of excellent research proposals. Intensive guidance, supervisions and feedback focusing on the contents and organisation of research proposals are strongly required by students to prevent their pitfalls and to produce better quality research proposals. This research has the following implications for further research:

- a) In writing research proposals, it involves more intensive guidance from research methodology lecturers, supervisors, and evaluators. It is therefore important to conduct further research on how effective lecturers, supervisors, and evaluators guide students to write research proposals.
- b) All research proposals have been revised by the students and were approved by the evaluators, however the proposals indicate a different standard of quality. For this reason, it is necessary to investigate standard criteria of approving research proposals.

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## Appendix A. Supplementary data

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