

A PRACTICAL APPROACH FOR APPLYING BASIC PROCEDURES IN APPLIED EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to provide a practical approach for applying basic procedures in applied educational research for school improvement. This article focuses on the application of a standard format for applied research that will help principals and teachers. The authors propose procedures for each of the categories commonly utilized in the study of educational problems. The authors further propose critical elements of developing an applied research proposal and how it can be made into a project and/or field study. Proven research methodologies are also included.

An Applied Research Project Proposal: The Framework For a School Improvement Project

The following gives an outline of each section of an applied research project proposal. Definitions of each section, the appropriate length of each section, as well examples are provided for each heading.

1. Title. The author should be careful to use enough descriptive words to catalog it by ERIC and Resources in Education. However, overly descriptive titles can become too lengthy and awkward.
2. Introduction to the Study. (Observation) This section should be short and attention getting. It describes what the proposal will cover and makes the reader interested in the topic. A brief background of where the study will be conducted as well as setting the stage for the study will add to the introduction. However, be sure to keep this section brief. Remember, this is a proposal, not the completed study. This section should be no more than two pages in length.
3. Review of Literature. (Research Base) At the proposal stage, this section deals with relevant information and literature pertaining to the topic. Previous research and literature should be included in this section. Five to 15 citations are normally recommended for a proposal and should be relevant and recent. This section should be two to six pages in length.
4. Statement of the Problem. This sets up the underlying intellectual motives for doing research on a specific topic and problem. An example follows:

There appears to be opposing conclusions in the research concerning collective bargaining and its effect upon the plight of the teacher. Smith (2004) found that bargaining had not benefited teachers. Jones (2004) noted that bargaining had greatly enhanced teacher morale.

Using opposing conclusions is an effective way to set up the statement of the problem. This section should be short, only one to two paragraphs in length.

5. Research Questions or Hypothesis. State the specific questions the study will attempt to answer. Here the researcher is breaking down the purpose of the study into several relevant research questions. Keep in mind the Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, and Research Questions must all fall logically in line and should be stated in one paragraph. See the following examples:
 - a. What was the level of teacher job satisfaction before bargaining rights?
 - b. What was the level of teacher job satisfaction after bargaining rights?
 - c. Was there a significant mean change in teacher job satisfaction following the acquisition of collective bargaining rights?
 - d. Hypothesis: This one sentence section puts the research questions in statistical terms. See the following example:

There is no significant difference in teacher job satisfaction following the acquisition of bargaining rights.
6. Definition of Terms. Define terms specific to the study that an outside reader may not be familiar with. Include general terms that are assumed all would know but might be different in various school systems in the region, state, or nation. The length of this section will vary depending on the number of definitions included. Examples are provided.
 - a. Temecula School District – This is a mostly rural school district in southern California comprised of 1,300 square miles. The district serves 10,000 students and employs 500 teachers.
 - b. TEA – The school district is an affiliate of the National Educational Association. Sixty-nine percent of all Temecula teachers belong to this organization.
 - c. Teacher(s) – Those persons employed in the school district with the primary objective being the academic instruction of students. This does not include librarians and counselors in this specific study.
7. Demographics. The vital statistics of the school and target group including mean scores of student assessments, ethnicity, and socioeconomic data.
8. School and Community Culture. The characteristics, concepts, habits, skills of a given school and community.

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9. Methodology.
 - a. Target Group. Subjects or samples should be described here (who and where). The population may also be described within this part.
 - b. Instruments. The instrument or test and specific materials should be described here. Also, validity and reliability may be discussed here.
 - c. Procedures. A step-by-step process of the plan of the study should be described in this section. The timeline and permission to do the study may also be mentioned.
 1. Terminal objectives
 2. Process objectives
 - d. Data Analysis.
 - e. Timeline
 10. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations. The results of the study should be summarize in this chapter and an explanation of “why the results turned out as they did” should accompany. This is an opportunity to brainstorm and provide expert knowledge. All factors and variables that could have played upon and influenced the dependent variable should be considered and discussed. This chapter should conclude with erudite statements from the researcher and recommendations for further study on the topic or a similar topic.
 11. References. References should be relevant to the subject and should be recent depending on the study. Five to 15 references are adequate.

In conclusion, this article provided a practical approach for applying basic procedures in applied educational research for school improvement. The application of a standardized format for applied educational research will help principles and teachers.