

THOUGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE ISSUE OF RESEARCH FORMAT

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A research format, sometimes called research outline, is simply a formal outline for thinking about and organizing the research. In *Methodology of Political Inquiry: Issues and Techniques of Research Methods in Political Science*, research format is aptly defined as “a procedural outline that provides the frame or layout plan for research execution and guide for research write-up” (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2006: 485). Is research format really important? Of course it is an important step in the organization of research. Research format or outlining is important because as Stuart (n.d.:1) points out:

when well done, it clearly shows the relationship between ideas in your paper and provides a plan for writing. It also helps you to think about your topic and to reach the level of synthesis and evaluation in learning. Finally, it can help you to determine whether the paper makes a convincing argument, before you spend time agonizing over grammar, sentence structure, word choice, and testimonial sentences (etc).

Before interrogating the content, let us also differentiate research format from a table of contents. For obvious reasons, research format looks like a table of contents but they are different in some respects. For example, while table of contents outlines the location of preliminary matters such as dedication and preface; research format is not interested in such issues. Furthermore, while table of contents contain paginations which guide the reader, research format does not necessary contain this. Very importantly, many would agree that not only is research format prepared or formulated by the researcher, research format is like an early stage or embryonic table of contents which guides a research writer in the organization of table of contents. The problematique however, is on the content and number of chapters that a research format should contain.

In many departments / disciplines in the social sciences and humanities generally, the vogue research format is often to align a five chapters: (1) Introduction (2) Literature Review (3) Methodology (4) Result / Discussions [Data Presentation and Interpretation] (5) Conclusion (See for example, Ekpenyong, 2013). Although one may concede that, in some research cases, the vogue format does suffice, suggesting as it were, that there is nothing inherently wrong with this vogue. This notwithstanding, it does not make good sense to insist or advocate that every research, particularly in the social sciences / humanities, irrespective of the phenomenon in focus and relevant paradigm, must adhere to the said research format rigidly and all the time.

My thinking is that just as what is being studied vary a lot, there are also varieties of research design - in political science, for instance, six research designs (McNabb, 2004) are easily identifiable – there should

also be varieties or options in research formats. Interestingly this position is also attested by many resourceful research writers and institutions; of which University of Washington (1997) and Paiva (2013) are typical examples. Further still, in page 3 of the *University of Ibadan, Manual of Styles* (2006) clearly states that a thesis / dissertation is expected to be made up of six chapters, thus: (1) Introduction (2) Literature Review (3) Methodology (4) Result (5) Discussions (6) Summary and Conclusion. Very importantly, the same document states that “the format presentation may vary with the subject matter and the discipline” (2006: 3). Thus, in the opinion and practice of Nigeria’s premier university, the content and number of chapters in a thesis / dissertation could vary depending on the issue studied in the specific discipline / department. On the same trajectory, Osuala (2005) in her work *Research and Statistics in Nursing and Related Fields* aligns more or less with a six chapter research format: (1) Introduction (2) Literature Review (3) Methodology (4) Data Presentation (Result) (5) Discussion and Findings (6) Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation.

Table 1: FIVE (5) CHAPTER RESEARCH FORMATS: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE OPTIONS

	QUANTITATIVE OPTION	QUALITATIVE OPTION	
1	INTRODUCTION	INTRODUCTION	1
	Background to the Study	Background to the Study	
	Statement of Research Problem	Statement of Research Problem	
	Research Questions	Research Questions	
	Objectives of the Study	Objectives of the Study	
	Significance / Justification of Study	Significance / Justification of Study	
	Scope and Delimitation of the Study	Scope and Delimitation of the Study	
	Limitations of the Study	Review of Related Literature	
	Operationalization of Concepts	Significance and Gap in Literature	
		Theoretical Framework	
2	LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROPOSITIONS	Research Hypotheses	
	Review of Related Literature	Research Design	
	Significance and Gap in Literature	Limitations of the Study	
	Theoretical Framework	Operationalization of Concepts	
	Statistical Hypotheses		
		DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	2
3	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS	[Appropriate chapter title and sub-chapter title]	
	Specification of the Research Design	Presentation of logical account and analysis of findings	
	Study Area	Focus here is on research question I and hypothesis I]	
	Population of the Study		
	Determination of the Sample Size	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	3
	Methods of Data Collection	[Appropriate chapter title and sub-chapter title]	
	Sampling Technique	Presentation of logical account and analysis of findings	
	Validity and Reliability Test Instruments	Focus here is on research question I and hypothesis II]	
	Instruments of Data Presentation		
	Method of Data Analysis	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	4
		[Appropriate chapter title and sub-chapter title]	
4	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	Presentation of logical account and analysis of findings	
	Data Presentation	Focus here is on research question I and hypothesis III]	
	Test of Statistical Hypotheses		
	Discussion and Analysis of Findings	CONCLUSION	6
		Summary	
5	CONCLUSION	Conclusion	
	Summary	Recommendations	
	Conclusion		
	Recommendations		

Source: Adopted and Improved upon from Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2011:244 - 248) and related sources.

Table 2: SIX (6) CHAPTER RESEARCH FORMATS: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE OPTIONS

	QUANTITATIVE OPTION	QUALITATIVE OPTION	
1	INTRODUCTION	INTRODUCTION	1
	Background to the Study	Background to the Study	
	Statement of Research Problem	Statement of Research Problem	
	Research Questions	Research Questions	
	Objectives of the Study	Objectives of the Study	
	Significance / Justification of Study	Significance / Justification of Study	
	Scope and Delimitation of the Study	Scope and Delimitation of the Study	
	Limitations of the Study	Limitations of the Study	
	Operationalization of Concepts	Operationalization of Concepts	
2	LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH DESIGN	LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH DESIGN	2
	Review of Related Literature	Review of Related Literature	
	Significance and Gap in Literature	Significance and Gap in Literature	
	Theoretical Framework	Theoretical Framework	
	Statistical Hypotheses	Research Hypotheses	
	Specification of the Research Design	Research Design	
	Study Area		
	Population of the Study	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	3
	Determination of the Sample Size	[Appropriate chapter title and sub-chapter title	
	Methods of Data Collection	Presentation of logical account and analysis of findings	
	Sampling Technique	Focus here is on research question 1 and hypothesis I]	
	Validity and Reliability Test Instruments		
	Instruments of Data Presentation	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	4
	Method of Data Analysis	[Appropriate chapter title and sub-chapter title	
		Presentation of logical account and analysis of findings	
3	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	Focus here is on research question 1 and hypothesis II]	
	Data Presentation		
	Test of Statistical Hypotheses	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	5
	Discussion and Analysis of Findings	[Appropriate chapter title and sub-chapter title	
		Presentation of logical account and analysis of findings	
4	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	Focus here is on research question 1 and hypothesis III]	
	Data Presentation		
	Test of Statistical Hypotheses	CONCLUSION	6
	Discussion and Analysis of Findings	Summary	
		Conclusion	
5	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	Recommendations	
	Data Presentation		
	Test of Statistical Hypotheses		
	Discussion and Analysis of Findings		
6	CONCLUSION		
	Summary		
	Conclusion		
	Recommendations		

Source: Adapted and Improved upon from Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2011:244 - 248) and related sources.

Three years or so ago, the Board of the Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria deliberated on and approved an innovative six and seven chapter research formats for MSc thesis and PhD dissertations respectively in political science. The thesis research format entailed (1) Introduction (2) Review of Literature and Research Design (3) Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation I

(4) Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation II (5) Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation III (6) Concluding Analysis.

Table 3: SEVEN (7) CHAPTER RESEARCH FORMATS: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE OPTIONS

	QUANTITATIVE OPTION	QUALITATIVE OPTION	
1	INTRODUCTION	INTRODUCTION	1
	Background to the Study	Background to the Study	
	Statement of Research Problem	Statement of Research Problem	
	Research Questions	Research Questions	
	Objectives of the Study	Objectives of the Study	
	Significance / Justification of Study	Significance / Justification of Study	
	Scope and Delimitation of the Study	Scope and Delimitation of the Study	
	Limitations of the Study	Limitations of the Study	
	Operationalization of Concepts	Operationalization of Concepts	
2	LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROPOSITIONS	LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROPOSITIONS	2
	Review of Related Literature	Review of Related Literature	
	Significance and Gap in Literature	Significance and Gap in Literature	
	Theoretical Framework	Theoretical Framework	
	Statistical Hypotheses	Research Hypotheses	
3	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN / METHODS	3
	Specification of the Research Design	Specification of Qualitative Research Design	
	Study Area	Study Area	
	Population of the Study	Population of the Study	
	Determination of the Sample Size	Determination of the Sample Size (if necessary)	
	Methods of Data Collection	Methods of Data Collection	
	Sampling Technique	Sampling Technique (if necessary)	
	Validity and Reliability Test Instruments	Validity and Reliability Test Instruments (if necessary)	
	Instruments of Data Presentation	Instruments of Data Presentation	
	Method of Data Analysis	Method of Data Analysis	
4	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	4
	Data Presentation	[Appropriate chapter title and sub-chapter title	
	Test of Statistical Hypotheses	Presentation of logical account and analysis of findings	
	Discussion and Analysis of Findings	Focus here is on research question 1 and hypothesis I]	
5	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	5
	Data Presentation	[Appropriate chapter title and sub-chapter title	
	Test of Statistical Hypotheses	Presentation of logical account and analysis of findings	
	Discussion and Analysis of Findings	Focus here is on research question 1 and hypothesis II]	
6	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS	6
	Data Presentation	[Appropriate chapter title and sub-chapter title	
	Test of Statistical Hypotheses	Presentation of logical account and analysis of findings	
	Discussion and Analysis of Findings	Focus here is on research question 1 and hypothesis III]	
7	CONCLUSION	CONCLUSION	7
	Summary	Summary	
	Conclusion	Conclusion	
	Recommendations	Recommendations	

Source: Adapted and Improved upon from Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2011:244 - 248) and related sources.

Dissertation research format represent a further improvement: (1) Introduction (2) Review of Literature (3) and Research Design (4) Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation I (5) Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation II (6) Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation III (7) Concluding Analysis (*Research Format*, 2014). Years before this, the Board had settled for a five chapter format for BSc research project, thus: (1) Introduction (2) Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation I (3) Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation II (4) Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation III (5) Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations.

Arising from the need to have need determined / research design driven format (Bhattacharjee, 2012), methinks that research formats in the social sciences / humanities, especially in political science, should in line with McNabb (2004), really be of two broad types: Quantitative and Qualitative. Table 1 above is a five chapter research format with quantitative and qualitative options. This would normally meet the needs of both quantitative and qualitative research project at BSc level.

As expected, quantitative researches, particularly in political inquiries align with exploratory, descriptive and causal research designs and the attendant statistical hypotheses. On the other hand, qualitative researches align with explanatory, interpretative and critical research designs and rely heavily on logical sequence. Qualitative researches necessarily involve eloquent account and argument to validate or invalidate the research hypothesis (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2016). For more advanced researches, such as we have in post graduate programmes, the format of the research should evolve from any of the options in the quantitative and qualitative researches. The implication is that the thesis or dissertation may appear like any of the options in table 2 or 3. Accordingly, tables 2 and 3 outlining six and seven chapter formats are recommended for MSc theses and PhD dissertations respectively.

It is perhaps already obvious, especially if one looks very closely at the content of each of the research formats, that each of the styles contain by and large similar items. The difference is largely on arrangement and emphasis. While some arrangements emphasize ‘A’ others lay emphasis on ‘B’ or even ‘C’. Every research writer need to understand that a research format is like a residential house plan. Every residential house plan has basic things such as sitting room, bedroom, restroom, kitchen etc.; for obvious reasons the arrangement and emphasis are not always the same. They vary from house plan to house plan. For research writers, what matters is whether the preferred research format is most appropriate for the subject or phenomenon being studied.

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Makodi BIEREENU-NNABUGWU, *PhD*, is a Professor of Political Theory and Methodology of Political Inquiry. He is the immediate past Head, Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, NIGERIA and the immediate past Director of Research and Publications of the Nigerian Political Science Association. Since March 2016, he has been on Sabbatical leave at the University of Calabar, Calabar, NIGERIA. Professor Biereenu-Nnabugwu has authored over a dozen books including *Political Theory: An Introductory Framework* (2003, 2013), *Fundamentals of Political Inquiry* (2004, 2011), *Africa in the March of Civilization: An Outline of African Heritage* (2005) *Methodology of Political Inquiry: Issues and Techniques of Research Methods in Political Science* (2006) *Political Analysis: An Introduction* (2008) and *Between Machiavelli and Nigeria* (2012), and has published widely in reputable local and international journals.