

Comments from the editors

The Structure of a Research Paper

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This is the first in a series of editorials that aims to address two common issues observed in many rejected submissions to the Arab Journal of Administrative Sciences (AJAS): either the manuscripts lack the scientific contribution necessary for publication, or they fail to adhere to established scientific norms in organizing research papers. These two issues are closely intertwined, as the primary purpose of adhering to a standard organizational structure is to clearly showcase the research contribution. A lack of adherence to this framework may cause reviewers to overlook the contribution, either because it is absent or obscured within the manuscript.

In this editorial, we offer guidance to assist researchers in increasing their chances of getting their papers accepted by AJAS and other leading journals. This article provides a detailed discussion of the key components of a successful research paper. While the content of this editorial may seem obvious to seasoned researchers, it is important to clarify these points for those at the beginning of their academic journey, as the skill of presenting a research contribution succinctly within a limited number of pages differs significantly from that required for a doctoral dissertation. Given the frequent recurrence of these issues in submissions to AJAS, it is necessary to outline the elements expected by the editorial board in manuscripts submitted for publication. We hope that our readers will find this editorial both informative and beneficial.

Writing a research paper requires the author to adhere to several key principles, including clear and precise language, avoiding ambiguous or difficult terminology, minimizing the use of abbreviations, and preferring the active voice—requirements that most academic journals mandate for submissions. However, good writing alone is not sufficient for a research paper to be accepted; it must also contain elements that demonstrate its scientific contribution and enhance its chances of being published. What, then, are the essential elements that a research paper must include?

Research Paper Structure

The use of a familiar organizational structure allows readers and reviewers to easily follow a research article's arguments and identify its contributions. This section discusses the main elements expected in a research article in their expected order and provides advice on how to strengthen them. These research article elements may vary slightly depending on the type of contribution or the methodology employed. However, most published research, whether it is written in Arabic or English, adheres to this general framework.

Research Title

The title of a research paper should reflect its contribution(s) and main story. The title should briefly state the central topic so that readers can quickly understand the paper's theme. Therefore, researchers must devote time to creating a title that accurately conveys the paper's content and can generate interest. One effective strategy is to have the title reflect the core research question of the research paper. For example, Elshandidy et al. (2015) chose the following question as the title for their paper: "What drives mandatory and voluntary risk reporting variations across Germany, [the] UK, and [the] US?"

Abstract

The abstract serves as the reader's entrance to the research paper. It is used to market the paper and can include an element of suspense to urge the reader to read the full article. We require abstracts at AJAS to be structured and should include at a minimum the following elements: the research aim and/or objective, which should convey the research question; the methodology, which should include the methods used, the sample size, the sampling period, and the study context; the main findings, which should focus on results that are directly related to the research objectives; and the originality of the research and its theoretical and practical implications. The length of an abstract varies based on the policy of the journal. However, at AJAS, we require they do not exceed 250 words.

Keywords

Search engines use keywords to simplify the process of finding research articles. A researcher should provide three to seven keywords that reflect the main topic, theory, and methodology of their research article as well as ideas that are closely related to the article.

Introduction

In the introduction section, researchers must provide a brief background of the topic under study and highlight the basis of the research problem. They should also demonstrate the importance of the research problem and discuss its implications. The research objectives and research questions must be clearly stated, and the theoretical, contextual, and practical motives behind the study should be made explicit. For example, an introduction can cover which theory predicts the relationship between variables X and Y and why it is important to study one context over another. Moreover, researchers should identify the key gaps in the literature and explain how their study addresses them. They should also briefly showcase the theoretical, methodological, and/or practical contributions of the research paper, and conclude with a short paragraph explaining the structure of the paper.

The introduction warrants significant attention because it is one of the most crucial elements of a research paper. It captivates and shapes the expectations of reviewers and readers. To enhance the paper's impact, it is advisable to rewrite the introduction multiple times throughout the various stages of the research lifecycle and use it to set the hook that piques the interest of readers and reviewers (Grant & Pollock, 2011).

Literature Review

In the literature review section, researchers should provide a comprehensive and critical review of the seminal and latest studies related to their field of research. They should analyze previous studies, identify the crucial gaps in the field, and indicate how their research contributes to this area of knowledge. The literature review should be directly related to the research problem, objectives, and questions. Furthermore, researchers engage in a conversation with their targeted journals through the literature review. Through the articles cited in the literature review, a reader can infer the quality of the research article and whether it fits with the aim and scope of the intended journal for publication. Therefore, authors should identify and engage with relevant articles from their targeted journals and journals known for their quality and scientific rigor.

Research Hypotheses

Research hypotheses are statements that the researcher develops that describe the relationships between constructs in the research paper and are based on

theoretical arguments in order to perceive a preliminary solution to the problem or phenomenon being studied. The researcher sets these expectations and tests them throughout the study to check their validity. Based on previous research findings, theoretical frameworks, and the study context, hypotheses can be directional or non-directional.

In building on the research hypotheses, the researcher must logically explain why and how these constructs are related. Simply citing prior literature or restating their findings is not a good way to argue in favor of a hypothesis. Instead, the researcher should engage with the literature and provide a coherent story as to why the constructs are relevant and why they should relate to one another in the way that they do (Sutton & Straw, 1995).

Research Methodology

This is a major section of a research paper because it reveals the suitability and reliability of the chosen research design. Researchers must justify the methodology used, including the analysis methods, sampling period, and sample selection criteria. They should also clearly define the variables and their measurements and support their arguments with relevant references.

Research Findings

The findings section discusses the study's results and provides answers to the research questions. In quantitative research, the results should be represented in tables, figures, and/or graphs, along with a descriptive interpretation. The researchers must ensure that the results shown in visual formats are consistent with the corresponding narrative explanations. In addition, the researchers must clearly state how their findings corroborate or refute the stated research hypotheses.

Researchers conducting qualitative research should explain the results using direct quotes from the data. They should organize data into thematic categories and explore the relationships between the findings and the participants' demographic characteristics. In addition, qualitative researchers need to link these findings and explain how they relate to the research questions.

Discussion

When discussing findings, researchers should clearly establish relationships between their study results and those in the literature, theoretical founda-

tions, and the institutional context of the country under study and explain how the study contributes to improving knowledge. Furthermore, it is important to highlight on new findings that have not already been covered in the literature. In instances where results deviated from the researchers' hypotheses, they should provide an explanation for these observations.

Conclusion

Researchers must summarize the answers to the research questions stated in the introduction to show whether they achieved their research objectives and highlight the main contributions of the paper. In addition, they should explain the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. The conclusion should also discuss the limitations of the study and provide suggestions for future research.

Reference Documentation

Research articles must conclude with a list of references, a foundational aspect of scientific writing that is essential for any rigorous study. Employing globally recognized citation guidelines ensures scientific integrity and mitigates the risk of plagiarism. Furthermore, proper citation allows readers to easily locate the cited sources, facilitating verification and further study.

Maintaining consistency and accuracy in citations is paramount. Every in-text citation must correspond to a specific reference list entry and be formatted uniformly. Researchers should be discerning when selecting articles to cite and prioritize relevant articles published in the target journal and other reputable sources, thereby enhancing the quality and credibility of their research.

Appendices (if applicable)

Researchers should include data and other types of information that are too extensive or detailed to be addressed in the main body of the paper in the appendices. Appendices provide additional context and can be valuable resources for other researchers.

In conclusion, the aforementioned elements represent the core components of scientific research papers. While these components may vary from one paper to another—adding or excluding certain elements depending on the nature of the research, its contributions, and methodology—most research can generally fit within this overall framework, whether written in Arabic or English. It

is important to note that adherence to this general structure is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a paper to be accepted for publication. In addition to including these elements, the research must make a significant and constructive scientific contribution, demonstrate strength and rigor, and offer a meaningful addition to its field of study. **This raises the question: when can we judge a research paper as strong, rigorous, and contributory?** This will be explored in the next editorial.

References

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