

STRENGTHENING THE ORGANIZING OF ARTICLES READINGS AMONG GRADUATE STUDENTS TO SUPPORT THEIR CONSTRUCTION OF RESEARCH PROPOSALS

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Abstract

The use of proper and appropriate technology can help graduate students' in developmental and constructive writing. The editing and refining processes involved in the writing can either be carried out individually or in small groups. These processes are helpful for novice education researchers to work on and build their research proposals. Their ability to organize information based on their reading of articles, as well as organizing the identified information systematically, is essential for writing a research proposal. A study was conducted to look at the thinking of graduate students on the use of a learning template that was developed by the researchers and used in the Research Methodology classes. This template, called the Organizing Article Review Template (OART), contains elements or focus to organize students' thinking and writing when they are reading research articles. A total of 34 Master students, four Research Methodology course instructors, and 16 Master students' Project Paper supervisors from the Faculty of Education of a public university in the North of Peninsular Malaysia were involved in the study entrenched within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). The data for this qualitative study was obtained from semi-structured interviews with all the research participants and from students' reflective writing. The findings of the study show the positive acceptance of students towards the use of templates to organize their reading of articles. The template trained them to focus on reading and selecting appropriate and relevant information in the articles. The use of technology tools such as computers, smart and android phones, as well as appropriate computer programs (for example Words, Excel, and Google docs) were very helpful in supporting the use of OART, which had contributed and helped them to further strengthened their process of writing the research proposals. Editing the components of the proposals was made more practical when using the OART to compare and contrast the identified information from the articles. This study contributes to the facilitation of Master's students towards being more systematically organized in their thinking when quoting important information from the articles. The use of the OART had also aided them be more confident and critical in writing their research proposals.

Keywords: Technology, Research Proposal; Learning Template, Article Readings, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

1. Introduction

Doing literature review is a complicated matter that sometimes is confusing and is a burdensome process especially among graduate students, and often they find it something challenging. Even so, in the past, this matter was infrequently given

consideration, but now it is getting the attention of various faculties and graduate schools as a result of increasing needs with the increasing number of graduates (Chen, Wang, & Lee, 2016). Writing literature review is an important skill that needs to be learned and acquired since literature review itself is a significant component of a research proposal. The research proposal is an academic text in which students at the tertiary level must write and indeed it is crucial for them because it is the first step for every graduate student to implement and publish their research as well as to complete their studies (Manchishi, Ndhlovu, & Mwanza, 2015; Pardede, 2015). Pardede (2015) also asserts that the research proposal is a document that specifically states what a student will study, why the study should be done, how it will be implemented, and how the results of the study will be analyzed and interpreted.

Graduates universally seem to have trouble preparing a solid research proposal. For example, a study was conducted by Pardede (2015) in which he investigated the difficulties experienced by English trainee teachers in writing research proposals. A total of 54 research proposals were evaluated by the Department of English Education at the Christian University of Indonesia in the academic year 2014/2015 and 2015/2016. The results of the analysis found that, among the top three problems encountered were formulating and synthesizing literature, writing the conceptual framework, and providing justifications for studying the identified research problem (Pardede, 2015). In another study at an educational institution in Indonesia, a qualitative study, using document analysis and interviews, was carried out by Ninik (2019). This study aimed to investigate 20 EFL students' difficulties in writing a research proposal. She reported that among the difficulties faced by the students were writing the literature review that focused on the research topic, choosing of the research paradigm, providing a detailed description of the research procedures and justifications for embarking on the study, comparing and describing some component of methodologies such as the research design, research site, and participants, data collection techniques, and data analysis. Some students were unable to write a solid background that included an introduction to the issues being studied as well as making critical review of past studies. In addition, some find it difficult to examine past empirical articles to assist them in identifying gaps in the area of their study.

Crafting the literature review could be a demanding task for graduate students. This of course worries the students for according to Walter and Stouck (2020), difficulties in writing literature review can have an impact on graduate students to complete their studies within a given period. Walter and Stouck (2020) had conducted a case study at a university in Canada with research participants consisting of Master and Doctoral students. Through surveys and focused group interviews, they found that among the difficulties faced by the research participants were to work critically on the literature they had obtained and the difficulty of managing lots of information to be written in the

literature review section of the research proposal. Issues related to writing literature review were also experienced by students in Zambia. A study was conducted to identify common mistakes as well as problems encountered by students in writing research proposals by (Manchishi, Ndhlovu & Mwanza, 2015) at the University of Zambia. Their research participants were 80 Master students, and they had used a fully qualitative approach. Analysis of their interview data showed that among the problems the students faced were failure to state the problem accurately, failure to compare the literature to identify gaps based on their reading, and failure to use appropriate methodology. Shamsavar and Kourepaz (2020) had used exploratory sequential mixed method design to evaluate the literature review section of 40 students' theses of from a university in Iran and then interviewed them. The results of the data analysis found that majority of students were not able to synthesize, critique, or explain the literature in their proposal writing. They are more focused on stating the findings and interpretations of past researchers.

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that graduate students in educational institutions outside Malaysia are indeed having problems when preparing their research proposals. Before embarking on this current study, we initially assumed that the graduate students in educational institutions in Malaysia were also facing some challenges and difficulties when preparing their research proposals, both at the Master and Doctoral levels. In fact, one of us was directly involved as a Research Methodology course instructor at a Faculty of Education in one of the public university in northern peninsular Malaysia.

In this current study, which was initiated under the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) study, we had interviewed the lecturers at the Education Faculty, who were either teaching the Research Methodology courses themselves or were the faculty graduate students' research supervisors of the Master and /or Doctoral students within the faculty. This paper reports part of the findings in the bigger study. We established, in the bigger study, the following key research question to capture the issues faced by the graduate students: What teaching approach can accommodate and support the understanding of research concepts towards the construction of graduate students' educational research proposals? As for the purpose of this paper, we (my colleague and I) are addressing the following objectives: (i) To understand the Research Methodology course instructors and the Master' students project papers supervisors thoughts on the deficiencies among their graduate students' educational research proposals, and (ii) To explore the Faculty of Education graduate students' thoughts on the organizing of their review of articles using the OART to support the construction of their research proposals.

2. An Overview of Our SoTL Study

We will first bring forward some views on the notion of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Almeida (2010) shared that “The scholarship of teaching and learning emerged as a fundamental concept to the development of good teaching practices in Higher Education and, consequently, to the enhancement of the quality of student learning” (p. 143). Blair (2015) asserted that SoTL is about handling your teaching as if it were a research topic and discovering innovative ways of doing things. SoTL is an influential educational process, not only promoting teaching and learning but being an integral part of academic discourse, it has an influential impact on academic activities and it needs to be researched from various perspectives (Mirhosseini, et al., 2018).

Our SoTL study was a qualitative study that explored the implementation of teaching and learning by instructors of the "Research Methodology" course taught to graduate students at the Faculty of Education. The impetus for the study was our colleagues' concerns regarding Education graduate students' quality of research proposals. Hence, we had embarked on the exploration of conducting interaction sessions that are more inclined to active involvement among students, which is based on 'Outcome-Based Education' and emphasizes on 'Student-Centered Learning'. As proposed by Almeida (2010), “conducting classroom research is one of the privileged ways to improve the scholarship of teaching and learning” (p. 152).

Noteworthy, in the Research Methodology course, every student must produce a research proposal. These proposals usually consist of three chapters and these proposals will be used by them to individually conduct research and subsequently produce their project paper (research) reports. Successful completion of their project papers is necessary for graduation. The production of this project paper is mandatory for the master program in this faculty of education. Briefly, the study had explored the use of the Organizing Article Review Template (OART), developed by us in an effort to guide and guide students to form study issues or problems, read empirical articles and highlight literature systematically and critically to assist the students in developing and writing their research proposals. Additionally, this study sought to capture the students' thoughts pertaining to the suitability of the OART in supporting their learning and journey to complete their research proposal. Gaining students' views will further enrich our understanding of research method pedagogy for the graduate students (Turner et al. 2018). Thus, this study focused more on the input given by graduate students during interviews with them as well as from their reflective writings.

3. Context of the Study

'Research Methodology' is a compulsory course for Master as well as Doctoral students at the Faculty of Education where this study was carried out. This course complements and strengthens research-related skills, including aspects of building a research proposal. However, there are students who feel anxious to take this course. This concern is compounded by the need for them to produce a research proposal that will be used for the purpose of their project paper, dissertation or thesis later.

Students who follow this course come from various fields of academic specialization at the Master level as well as Ph.D. level, for example, Education Management, Curriculum and Teaching, Counselling, etc. Therefore, this course should meet the needs of students from various backgrounds of knowledge disciplines. Thus, in a sense, this course is very valuable and meaningful to equip Master's Program students with knowledge of research methods, especially in the context of social sciences, which can be applied in research that they will implement later. As expounded by Zablotzky (2001), the Research Methodology course is such an important course, even for students who do not intend to conduct research in the future as they still have to make wise decisions based on research findings as part of their professional development. Notably, there are reports stating that educational students take research method courses with a feeling of stress and anxiety even though in most cases, they are actually not very clear about the scope of research methodology content (Murtonen & Lehtiner, 2003).

This study is a study related to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL). The researcher embarked on this study as he taught this course during Semester SEP 2017/2018. In fact, we obtained a SOTL Grant to carry out this study. For this Research Methodology course, one of the Course Learning Outcome (CLO) was students were able to write educational research proposals. The students can actually later use the proposal to implement their Project Paper or PhD study under the supervision of supervisors appointed by the faculty. This paper will provide a glimpse into the graduate students' thoughts on their experience and benefits of using our designed template – the OART.

4. Engaging Learners in Learning

Although learning is said to occur when a student listens passively, it is believed that students learn better when they are engaged with the content and process of instruction. Among the best teaching approaches are those that involve active students' involvement (Bryson & Hand, 2007)..According to Ausubel (1960), an advance organizer is a material that is introduced before an unfamiliar content for students is

given to facilitate assimilation. Graphic organizers provide a holistic visual representation of the facts and concepts and the relationships between them in an organized framework. They exist in various forms including sequence chains, story maps, main idea tables, flow charts, matrices and Venn diagrams (Anders, Bos&Filip, 1984). When used during teaching, they can help to process and rearrange information (Shihusa & Keraro, 2008). Thus, the advance organizer becomes an anchor for the acceptance of a new content (Ausubel, 1963). Therefore, the designed OART in this study, which was shared with the graduate students during Research Methodology classes, was intended to be a base and structural framework for students to complete so that they are able to acquire new knowledge in a more practical and structured manner, especially towards the writing of their research proposals.

5. Scenarios in the Research Methodology Classroom

Below are among the four instructors' responses when asked to provide evidence based on their observations on their students' behaviours while in their classrooms as justifications for the need to carry out this SOTL study:

"During my first class, some were worried because they thought the "Research Methodology" course mostly contains lots of statistical aspects" (CI-01).

"I can see the worrying on their less interested faces; some were sleepy at the beginning of the class and did not focus on the teaching and discussion in class" (CI-02).

"During the "hands-on" activities, they seem "interested" in completing the activities and tasks given." (CI-03).

"Students find it difficult to identify important content from empirical articles they read and are not systematic in their approach to reading and publishing important content from the articles." (CI-04).

"Students find it difficult to organize information obtained from their reading sources and to worked on it and synthesized it properly so that it can be included in their research proposal." (CI-02)".

"My students take a long time to build and organize their research problem statements." (CI-04).

"There are complaints among students that many of them really need to understand and stay in this 'Research Methodology' course before they can sit down and start writing their research proposal."(CI-02).

Below are among the researcher's' own experience with the issues that students were facing when implementing the research methodology course:

- (i) Unable to develop issues or problem statements firmly.
- (ii) Lacked skills to work on literature highlights critically and lack skills in synthesizing relevant literature highlights.
- (iii) Assumed that the course does not really require a lot of articles readings and to also to include other reference materials to strengthen the writing of their research proposals.
- (iv) Sharing knowledge among the students themselves was very rare and this further complicated the problems they faced. In fact, they had less opportunity to exchange views and understanding with their classmates as a whole despite having a preference to be in a circle or group of peers socially, especially when asked to discuss in groups or in pairs.
- (v) Less able to organize the information they get after reading empirical articles.
- (vi) Lacked skills to compose the results of the highlights of the literature that they read.

6. Overview of Comments Related to the Issue

We had carried out one-to-one semi-structured interviews with the selected supervisors' to learn their views on the research proposals produced by their students of the Research Project Paper course. Their responses in the interviews had provided a meaningful insight for us to further delve into the issues and difficulties that the graduate students were facing when writing their research proposals. Among the project paper supervisors' responses were:

"The writing of the proposal is less robust because they are not clear of the issues that they want to research on." (PPS-01).

"Do not elaborate on justifying the selection of issues firmly, does not analyse issues well, and stated research problems without providing supporting evidence." (PPS-02).

"Do not clearly highlight the knowledge gap." (PPS-03).

"Do not delve deeply into selected issues" (PPS-04).

"Writing literature review that tends to be more like reporting the findings of past studies without giving their critical opinions" (PPS-05).

“In my opinion, students do not understand what is meant by daily problems and study problems. Daily problems are problems that we feel are a problem. But research problems need to be proven with solid data, literature and reading sources to prove that it is a problem and many writers and researchers see it as a problem” (PPS-08)

“Students often do not realize that literature makes a strong connection with the problem to be studied. Strong literature writing will be able to help students write chapter five well. The culture to understand the relationship between chapters one to five does not exist among project paper students. Often students think that literature is one of the mandatory chapters and do not understand the extent to which the literature function can support the theoretical framework and concepts of their study” (PPS-09).

“Students study hard and do not study smart. From my observations, I find it can be said that a large number of courses require students to read the article or refer article. So logically if the article is collected from semester one until it is time to write the literature review, then at least each student will have a compact file with a collection of articles that have been read and referenced. However, instead of what happened, when it came time to write literature review, students once again struggled to find the literature.” (PPS-11).

“Does not highlight the knowledge gap - why research needs to be done and what are the differences and shortcomings of previous studies.” (PPS-1).

The results of interviews with the Research Methodology course instructors, Master’s Project Paper course supervisors, and based on the experience of one of us (the researchers), it is clear that graduate students around the world face similar difficulties and issues when they want to write their research proposals, either at the Master or at the PhD level. In general, it can be said that the thoughts of the instructors and project papers’ supervisors pertaining to the issues encountered by graduates in the context of writing a research proposal, are seemingly in line with the findings reported by Pardede (2015) and Ninik (2019) in Indonesia, Walter and Stouck (2020) in Canada, Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza (2015) in Zambia, and Shahsavari and Kourepaz (2020) in Iran.

7. Methods

We employed a qualitative approach in this current study. Data were acquired via individual interviews, and reflective writings in the portfolios (called ‘My Learning Portfolio’) provided by students whereby it contained documents and reports related to the content learned, the assignments that have been completed during the course, and their weekly reflection writing and the ‘prime’ reflection writing. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and were fully transcribed before analysing them thematically (Fuziah, Ruzlan&Fahainis, 2018).

8. The Research Participants

The research participants consisted of 34 graduate students from Group L (comprising of 16 students) and Group M (comprising of 18 students) Semester SEP 2017/2018. The students in these two groups were at least in their third semester.

The Instrument - Organizing of Literature Review Template

The instrument is a learning template simply because it helps in the graduate students' learning when constructing and designing their research proposals. In this study, we had designed the Organizing of Literature Review Template.

The Idea for Construction of the OART

Basically the design of the organizing article review template was based on the notion of 'advanced organizer' (Ausubel, 1960) and the five elements suggested by Creswell (2012) when writing the section of 'problem statement' in the educational research proposal. Advance organizers and graphic organizers are an effective way to guide students to complete a task because it is able to give a meaningful overview of a task or topic that needs to be completed and it can also represent or show the relationships between the concepts that are being learned (Mohammadi, Moenikia, & Zahed-Babelan, 2010).

An advance organizer does not need to be too long or complicated. It is sufficient if it is easy to understand and is relevant (Mayer, 2003). The function of the advance organizer is to support the learning process and it is given at the beginning of learning process before introducing concept. Thus, the advance organizer becomes a framework to enable students to learn new ideas or meaningfully relate these new ideas to their existing knowledge (Zaman, Choudhary, & Qamar, 2019). Wise and Cooper (2019) express that Graphic organizer is a learning tool for students of all ages and it helps students to organize, explain, or formulate complex information and it can guide students to build understanding through surveys of relationships between concepts. They further suggest that an advance organizer constructed by the instructor himself is useful for scaffolding and supporting student learning. It also provides an opportunity for students to analyze complex texts, identify patterns and compare perspectives. In addition it can also guide students towards deeper understanding. The above views were taken into account by us when this OART was designed.

Below is an example of the OART:

This template contains three main columns labelled as 'No.', 'Focus' and 'Article'. For the "Focus" column, the number elements in the 'focus', column is not necessarily 17 elements as shown Table 1. An instructor can simply reduce the number of elements in the 'focus' column or insert new elements. These elements can vary to suit the type of articles that the students are reading, for example whether the articles are 'quantitative' or 'qualitative' articles, or the articles involved mixed methods.

The template shown in Table 1 was used when students were only reading one article. The information obtained from their reading can be accordingly included in the column labelled 'Article 1' following the elements given in the 'Focus' column.

Table 1. The Organizing Article Review Template for One Article

No	Focus	Article 1
1.	Topic/Title of article	
2.	Reference for this article (APA 6th ed. Style) (for the purpose of including this paper as reference in your report / thesis 'Reference' list.)	
3.	Issue / Research Problem (in the study)	
4.	Research Objectives (if applicable)	
5.	Research Questions (if applicable)	
6.	Hypothesis(es) (if applicable)	
7.	Variables (in the study)	
8.	Research Design (including your views regarding the appropriateness of the design / its strengths / its weaknesses)	
9.	Target Population (in the study)	
10.	Sample (in the study)	
11.	Analysis of Data	
12.	Finding(s) / Result(s)	
13.	The Research Limitation (s)	
14.	The Significance of the Study	
15.	Suggested Future Research	
16.	What is/are the gap/gaps being addressed in this study / paper?	
17.	What is/ are the implication(s) of the study?	
18.	My Reflection / Critical Analysis	

	(Some Examples of questions to guide your “reflection” writing): (i) What do you think of the study? (ii) What have you learned from the study / paper? (iii) What is / are the strength / strengths of this study / paper? (iv) What is / are the weakness / weaknesses of this study / paper?	
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If students want to compare the contents of two or more articles, then the number of columns for the article can be increased, as shown in Table2. This can be easily done as students only need to use their computers to modify the template according to different situations as well as according to their needs.

Table 2. The Organizing Article Review Template for More Than One Article

No	Focus	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3
1.	Topic/Title of article			
2.	Reference for this article (APA 6th ed. Style) (for the purpose of including this paper as reference in your report / thesis ‘Reference’ list.)			
3.	Issue / Research Problem (in the study)			
4.	Research Objectives (if applicable)			
5.	Research Questions (if applicable)			
6.	Hypothesis(es) (if applicable)			
7.	Variables (in the study)			
8.	Research Design (including your views regarding the appropriateness of the design / its strengths / its weaknesses)			
9.	Target Population (in the study)			
10.	Sample (in the study)			
11.	Analysis of Data			
12.	Finding(s) / Result(s)			
13.	The Research Limitation (s)			
14.	The Significance of the Study			

15.	Suggested Future Research			
16.	What is/are the gap/gaps being addressed in this study / paper?			
17.	What is/ are the implication(s) of the study?			
18.	My Reflection / Critical Analysis (Some Examples of questions to guide your “reflection” writing): (i) What do you think of the study? (ii) What have you learned from the study / paper? (iii) What is / are the strength / strengths of this study / paper? (iv) What is / are the weakness / weaknesses of this study / paper?			

My Learning Portfolio

Students who took the Research Methodology course with the instructor/researcher were required to submit 'My Learning Portfolio' which is a component of their assessment, and in it included their reflection on their course learning experience from Week 1 until Week 14. Their reflections on using the OART were identified from their reflective writings. We presented one of their reflections within 'The Results' section of this paper.

The Procedures

The study was conducted in five distinct phases, which are.

(i) Phase 1 – During this phase, we had designed two (2) sets of semi-structured interview questions based on literatures that researched on similar issues that we were researching. One set was for the interviews with course instructors and Master’s project paper supervisors while the other set is the interviews with the students. Validation of the appropriateness and suitability of interview questions was carried out with two our university colleagues who were also teaching the Research Methodology course in another school in the university.

Examples of the interview questions with the Research Methodology course instructors and the project paper supervisors are: (i) What are the weaknesses (s) that you found in

the writing of the problem statement section in their research proposals? And (ii) What are the weaknesses that you found in their writing of the Literature Review Chapters.

Examples of the interview questions with the graduate students are: (i) What do you think of the OART? (ii) In what way has the OART assisted you with the writing of your research proposal?

(ii) Phase 2 – One-to-one semi-structured interviews with the Research Methodology course instructors and the Master's Project Paper supervisors. The purpose of this interview was to understand the issues related to students' situations in the Research Methodology classes and the views of the course instructors as well as Master's Project Paper supervisors on students' competencies in preparing research proposals. Some of the findings within this phase is presented in the sections 'Scenarios in the Research Methodology Classroom' and 'Overview of Comments Related to the Issue' above.

(iii) Phase 3 – This phase is implemented in week 1 to week 3 of the Research Methodology Course lecture. Implementation of the template (out of 14 weeks, we had allocated 3 weeks (9 hours) for understanding the concepts of the template – and learning activities and individual and group presentations (in-class learning activities). During week 1 to week 3, students were given articles to read and based on the topics within the course syllabus and presented their readings and works based on the given articles. During these first three weeks, they were not exposed to the template. During their class in week 4, the template was introduced to them. The instructor/researcher had meticulously explained the concept, purpose and focus of the template. There were then given a research article and were individually requested to read the article and at the same time filled the template using Microsoft Word processing program. They were then requested to individually present their work to the class. As they presented their works, the instructor provided feedback and helped cleared their mistakes. Subsequently, they were divided into a group of 3-4 persons to re-read the article and each group were asked to work collaboratively to complete a new template. Each group were requested to present their group's work in week 5. Further discussion took place in week 5 and further feedback was also given by the instructor. Before the class ended, there were given the task to identify one article each, a quantitative, qualitative or a mixed-method article. Their task was to read the article and complete the template for individual presentation during week 6 class. They were asked to write their reflection on their learning from week 5 to week 6.

From week 7 onwards, they were very much encourage to use the organizing the article review templates (OART) to begin drafting their research proposals. They were also

reminded that OART can be used to help write all the three chapters of their proposals (namely Chapter 1 Introduction; Chapter 2 Literature Review; and Chapter 3 Methodology).

Phase 4 – The students were asked to write their reflection on their experience in using OART and included them in their “My Learning Portfolio”.

Phase 5 – During this phase, one-to-one semi-structured interviews with the students were carried out during this phase. The purpose of these interviews were to obtain their thoughts on the usage of OART.

Analysis of Data

The interview data were fully transcribed into text. From this transcription, excerpts were selected to reflect their responses that touched on the use of the OART. The data was then analysed by adopting the reflexive thematic analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2019) called reflexive TA. The resulted themes are presented in the Discussion and Conclusion section of this paper.

9. The Results

We provide a glimpse into some of the responses from the interviews with the student via some selected excerpts. OART seemingly was useful to write some components within the research proposals. GS-03 (Graduate Student 3) said that:

“This research methodology course had helped me in understanding further about the application of qualitative and quantitative research and different types of methodologies which I had known very little before. The process of writing research proposal was the one I found most useful since I get to use this template... it helps me to construct problem statement, research objectives and research questions, methodology and also research instruments.” (GS-03).

The template can be used during small group discussion on matters related to research proposal writing. For instance, it allowed the comparison between different methodologies mentioned within the research articles. OART When asked what she likes about using the template during the research methodology class, GS-09 responded:

“Certainly! I found your lecture style comprehensible and helps to reduce our confusions, especially when comparisons between types of research was discussed. It makes our group discussion more focus when we compared the different methodologies. By using this template, it was like we were also allowed to have hands-

on learning when we were required to read and examine other research papers.” (GS-09).

OART had allowed the students to transfer their work in the template to their Word document of the research proposal. As indicated by GS-14:

“After following today's teaching and learning session, I should be able to easily transfer information from the given article. I did my proposal on Word...I can easily copied what I wrote in the template to my proposal draft in Word.” (GS-14).

OART had also served as a useful guide to better understand the content of the article. As reported by GS-11:

“Article Review The template is very interesting to use in my view. Before this I felt very difficult to make an article review because there is no specific guide in addition to the language problem of the article used. I was taught how to complete the template through activity 2, which must be carried out in small groups. Through that activity and the use of Article Review Template, I feel more understanding to do article review.”(GS-34).

Excerpts from Students' Reflective Writing

From the students reflective writings, among the themes that emerged are (i) OART help to identify research gap (GS-11, 2018; OART allowed easy transfer from the template to Excel sheets (GS-11, 2018; GS-29, 2018); OART assisted in detail understanding of the research article (GS-18, 2018; GS-29, 2018); OART ensured easier searching of references for future study (GS-28, 2018); OART made group discussion on research articles more focused and systematic (GS-34, 2018); and OART allowed easier retrieval of information. The following are examples of excerpts from the reflective writings:

“I learned how to fit few information in the organizing article review template in order to find the gap based on my research topic. When filling up the template, I realized that, I need to do a lot of reading to support my research in preparing for my research proposal. I tried to transfer this template into Excel sheets because I wanted to compare more than three articles at once. I found this strategy was very helpful to me” (GS-11).

“In my opinion writing in the template is a new exposure to us and it is very useful because it helps me to understand in more detail what I wrote during the review of articles. The items found in the template as a whole have been systematically arranged and interconnected with each other. For me, writing in this article review template will

also make it easier for me to make a summary of the articles I read and further make it easier for me to make references in carrying out my next study ”(GS-28).

“The use of templates for article review also helps me a lot in understanding and deepening an article I read. Although before reading the article and making a review is very difficult for me, but with this template it is very helpful for me in making an article review. With this template, I think reading an article a day will not cause me any more problems. After attending today's teaching and learning session, I should be able to easily transfer information from articles.” (GS-29).

“The template really helped me to rearrange all the information I got from my reading. It also makes it easier for me to retrieve that information when needed. I feel this template should be given much earlier. This is because, throughout our undergraduate studies, there are various articles that we have and need to read to complete the given assignment. If from the beginning we were able to gather all the information from those articles in the form of templates, I feel that we already have a collection of articles that are very useful to prepare my research proposal later.” (GS-33).

“I feel very grateful because Dr. has introduced this Template Article Review to us and this will be the starting point for us to start saving articles that we have read in the form of templates. InsyaAllah this template will be very useful for us in the future when I write my research proposal and then complete my project paper later. When we discussed in groups, we use Google docs which made our discussion easier and more focus.” (GS-34).

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the study show the positive acceptance of students towards the use of templates to organize their reading of articles. The template trained them to focus on reading and selecting appropriate and relevant

Information in the articles. The use of technology tools such as computers, smart and android phones, as well as appropriate computer programs (for example Words, Excel, and Google docs) were very helpful in supporting using the use of OART, which had contributed and helped them to further strengthened their process of writing the research proposals. Editing the components of the proposals was made more practical when using the OART to compare and contrast the identified information from the articles. This study contributes to the facilitation of Master's students towards being more systematically organized in their thinking when quoting important information from

the articles. The use of the OART had also helped them be more confident and critical in writing their research proposals.

The results from students' Interviews and their reflective writings indicated the generally the use of OART had in a way elevated their enthusiasm in the writing of their research proposal. The fact that the OART can be used in the form of Microsoft Word, Google docs or Excel sheet had facilitated their individual work as well as when they are having group discussions on the articles. Another encouraging point is the opportunity to revisit the filled template as many time as possible when re-reading the same articles, or other articles with similar focus or issue, had helped them to better comprehend the articles' content. Analysis on student reflection writings indicate that the use of OART can help the graduate students to edit and modify the construction of their research proposals.

We are of the opinion that this study contributes to the Student-Centred Learning approach where students are able to construct the writing of their research proposals through self-learning through potential learning templates to accommodate their learning through instructional and structured information provided by the instructor. The use of OART supports student engagement in learning. At the very least, the OART could function as a base for the development of critical thinking skills among the graduate students after repeatedly 'rethinking' and 're-reading' the research articles as they work on to complete the OART. Nevertheless, there may be other better approaches, but we can take the content of their reflective writings as an indicators or evidence that 'active' learning has taken place - "in a sense, they were engaged".

We would like to conclude here that the use of OART helps graduate students in organizing what they gained from reading of articles in a more organized and focused manner. The use of this template is not only focused on completing Chapter 2 of the proposal (the chapter on Literature Review) – but also contributes to the writing of other elements in the proposal, for example the sections on background of the study, and problem statement. The template also allows the ease to compare the different methodologies used in previous studies despite focussing on the same issue or theme. In addition, when comparing previous studies, students can understand and identify the objectives, research questions, research instruments that have been used and also the approaches and techniques of data analysis by past researchers. This can further strengthen students' understanding in conceptualizing each element within the research proposal as well as it can help to better identify the gap, or gaps, in the issue they want to investigate. Thus, taking into account of the responses that the research participants in this study had communicated in this study, and understanding their responses, it is our hope that Research Methodology course instructors, or other similar course instructors, will consider using OART, or modify it as necessary, in their classes towards accommodating their students' understanding of information that they gained from

reading empirical articles and transferring this understanding in the construction of research proposals that reflect thinking that is more structured, systematic, and critical. Further research can be done by looking at the effectiveness of the use of similar learning templates using experimental design where the impact on the quality of proposal writing as well as thinking related to writing of educational research proposal between the groups receiving interventions using learning templates compared to groups that do not use any learning templates.

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