



Editorial : Writing an Appropriate Methods Section for a Research Article: Design, Ethical Considerations and Sample

Over the years, while editing numerous manuscripts, we have noted a consistent problem exists regarding the manner in which the method section, of research articles, is written. All too often crucial content is missing and, thus, the reader is unable to truly understand what the researcher did. If the method section of the article is poorly written, not only will the reader not understand what was done, but no one can replicate the researcher's work, since no one will know what actually had been done.

In general, **the method section, of a research article, needs to contain the following elements: design, ethical considerations, sample, procedure, instruments or measurements, and data analysis.** Each of these elements will be discussed, over the next two issues of the *Thai Journal of Nursing Research*. In this issue, **we will focus on what needs to be included in the: design, ethical considerations and sample components of the method section of a research article.**

Design: The design component of the method section needs to briefly indicate what type of design was used in the study. For example, if the study was **qualitative** in nature, the author needs to indicate the approach used (i.e. phenomenology, grounded theory, historical, ethnography or participative action research.). Since several of these qualitative approaches have varying ways of implementing the analysis of the data, the author needs to indicate clearly the specific approach used. For example:

If phenomenology was used, was the analytical approach Heideggerian or Gadamerian?

If grounded theory was used, was the analytical approach based on the work of Glaser and Strauss, or on the work of Corbin and Strauss?

If a **quantitative** research project was conducted, the author needs to explicate the type of design used. For example, was the research design: descriptive; correlational; quasi-experimental; experimental; or, non-traditional?

- If the design was **descriptive**, was it a typical descriptive, comparative descriptive or time dimensional design?
- If the design was **correlational**, was it descriptive correlational, predictive correlational or model-testing?
- If the design was **quasi-experimental**, was it a type of a non-equivalent group design, or an interrupted time-series design?

- For an **experimental** design, was it a: classic experimental design; post-test only control group design; randomized block design; factorial design; nested design; cross-over or counterbalanced design; or, randomized clinical trial design?
- Finally, if the research design was **non-traditional**, was it a: primary prevention and health promotion study; secondary analysis; meta-analysis; or, methodological design?

It is possible for a researcher to use a **mixed design**, and utilize both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. If this occurs, the author must indicate that a mixed design was used and explain what type of quantitative and qualitative approaches were implemented. For example, the researcher may have implemented a predictive correlational design, using specific survey instruments, but also interviewed the participants, using a grounded theory approach.

It is essential for the author to clearly identify what research design was used, in his/her study. This is necessary so the reader will be prepared for what to expect in the procedure component of the method section of the research article.

Ethical considerations: Whenever human or animal subjects are used, in a study, ethical considerations are required. Since most nursing studies use human subjects, rather than animal subjects, we will address only **ethical considerations related to human subjects. The author must indicate that consent to engage in a study was obtained from his/her institution (i.e. university, hospital, or clinic).** In most situations this means that the author has obtained approval, to gather data, from the institution's Human Assurance Committee. In addition, depending upon the research sites (hospital, clinic, school, etc.) used in the study, approval also may be required from these organizations' Human Assurance Committees or from the organizations' appropriate administrative officers. **It is essential that the author indicate that approval to gather data was granted, both by the researcher's institution and by each research site, prior to any form of data gathering.**

In addition to indicating approval was obtained from the researcher's institution and each of the data gathering sites, the author is required to indicate that consent, either verbal or written, was obtained from each research subject, prior to his/her involvement. In addition, the author must state that each subject was informed of the following: **the purpose of the study; what would be involved, if the subject agreed to become part of the study; how much of the subject's time would be required in order to participate in the study; his/her confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained; and, that he/she could withdraw, from the study, at any time, without negative repercussions.**

If **survey questionnaires** were used, for data gathering, the completion of the questionnaires serves as the subject's consent to participate, as long as the questionnaires cannot be identified with any specific subject. When questionnaires are used, the author needs to indicate whether code numbers, instead of the respective subjects' names, were placed on the completed questionnaires for the purpose of identification.

If an **interview** of a subject was part of the research procedure, the author needs to indicate if it was done in private, and how the subject's confidentiality and anonymity was maintained. Additionally, anytime a subject has been tape recorded, as part of the research, the author must indicate whether the subject gave verbal or written consent to be recorded.

When **children** have been part of a research project, **the author must reveal whether their respective parents signed a consent form granting approval for their children to participate.** In addition, it must be clearly indicated that each child, if he/she is old enough to understand, received an explanation, just as is done with adult subjects, regarding what will be involved in the study and what rights he/she has regarding the study. Even though a parent may grant approval for his/her child to participate, in a study, the child may not want to be involved. Thus, **the author must indicate whether children, who are old enough to understand, signed an assent form, in addition to their respective parents signing a consent form.**

Sample: In all research articles, the author needs to provide a comprehensive description of the study's sample, so when readers examine the research findings, they have a thorough understanding of what type of individuals generated the data that were obtained. Knowing what a study's subjects were like assists other researchers and readers of the research article to determine how applicable the findings are to their research, or to their particular work situation.

Information about the sample that must be addressed includes: **who was studied; how the subjects were identified and contacted; the location of the subjects; the subjects' inclusion criteria; how many subjects were involved in the study; how many subjects either dropped out of the study or were excluded from the study; information about why subjects dropped out or were excluded; the characteristics of the subjects (age, education, income, gender, information specific to the study, etc.); and how many (number and percentage) subjects were in each characteristic category.** The sample's characteristics may vary greatly depending upon the nature and focus of the study. **The sample characteristics can be put either into a table format or described in the narrative of the article.** However, **the narrative and the table should not repeat the same information, since doing so is redundant.**

Summary: The design, ethical considerations and sample components of the method section of a research article are only some of the important content that is required. Having well developed design, ethical considerations and sample components in the method section of a research article greatly enhances the possibility of having one's article accepted for publication, in an English language journal. If these components, of a research article, have been poorly developed, a reviewer will question the author's ability to adequately explain exactly what was done during the research process.

In the next issue of the ***Thai Journal for Nursing Research***, the editors will discuss what needs to be addressed in the procedure, instruments or measurements, and data analysis components

of the method section of a research article. **Authors need to recognize that the likelihood of having their manuscript accepted for publication is enhanced if ALL parts of the research article are well written and thoroughly developed.**

We, as editors of the *Thai Journal of Nursing Research*, look forward to you submitting your research manuscripts for consideration for publication in the *Thai Journal of Nursing Research*.

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