

ARSHAD AYUB GRADUATE BUSINESS SCHOOL
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

DBA DISSERTATION & PHD MIXED MODE
THESIS GUIDELINES

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PREFACE

A doctoral dissertation or thesis is indeed the most important part of any doctoral degree. It is the culmination of a student's years of hard work towards producing an original contribution to his/her academic field. The completion of one's dissertation or thesis is certainly not without many challenges, from developing a clear problem statement to defending the originality of your work and understanding its contribution to knowledge. Though some may find it a rather daunting prospect in the beginning, it certainly is possible and above all, clearly achievable.

Towards ensuring a smooth academic journey in completing one's dissertation and thesis, the Academic Office of Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School has prepared these guidelines for students to abide by in planning and writing them. These guidelines provide students with the basic elements as well as the structure that are generally contained in any dissertation and thesis. Like any other academic output, the preparation of a dissertation or thesis is also bound by certain academic conventions and rules. It is hoped that with these guidelines, students will have a further understanding and appreciation towards those conventions and rules.

The term 'dissertation' here refers to the documentation of an original research work that has been prepared and then on submitted by a candidate for the award of the degree for the Doctoral program by coursework while the term 'thesis' here refers to the documentation of an original research work that has been prepared and then on submitted by a candidate for the award of the degree for the Doctoral program by mixed mode.

The Academic Office would like to acknowledge the efforts of Professor Dr. Rosmimah Mohd Roslin and Professor Dr. Norlida Abdul Hamid who initiated and drafted this guideline. It is hoped that these guidelines will assist students in preparing and completing the final output of a dissertation or thesis.

'You can never cross the ocean until you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.'
Christopher Columbus

*Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School
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1. INTRODUCTION

Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School (AAGBS) offers two doctoral programs, the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) and the Doctor of Philosophy in Business Management (PhD Mixed Mode). Both doctoral programs have their unique offerings and tend to attract different sets of students. On this note, it is pertinent that lecturers acting as supervisors and examiners understand the distinction between the two programs to allow for a fair and appropriate supervision and examination.



**Doctor of Business
Administration
(DBA)
[AA901]**

2. DBA (AA901)

2.1 Program Background

This program has been designed against the backdrop of those from the industry in mind. It is a doctoral program in which students who are largely managers or those in mid and upper level management are exposed to theoretical and academic understandings of relevant disciplines in Business and Management. This is a program that integrates practical applications with a reasonable in-depth of theoretical bases, typical of scholarly demands. The DBA at AAGBS is a 3-year program (full-time or part time program) encompassing a year and a half of coursework and another one year and a half on the research conduct.

The coursework comprised of doctoral levels business and management subjects that are aimed at eliciting ideas to develop research topics and determine appropriate research designs. There will be a combination of specific business and management courses and elements of research methods taught in the program. As the target group for this program is the practitioners from the industry, the expectation on the doctoral thesis/dissertation is essentially an integration of applied with a reasonable input of theoretical bases in conceptualizing the study and the analyses of data. Thus, the program has been developed with its unique element of combining practice and certain depth of theoretical demand.

2.2 Focus of Study

DBA dissertation deals with issues and problems specific to an organization or an industry. Although its theoretical underpinning is regarded as important to the conceptualization of the research framework, it shall be used to merely understand its influence on the professional or industry practices *only* and not necessarily to contribute to existing body of knowledge. Theoretical extension is possible but will not be the focus in the evaluation of the proposal. The study itself will not necessarily be evaluated based on knowledge enhancement.

In terms of literature review, the review of literature will incorporate core and supporting theories relating to the research problem. The literature review for the proposal must indicate the presence of gaps as well as identify industry perspectives that prior studies have or have not done extensively.

Case studies are allowed in a DBA dissertation where the focus of the research is on an organization or an industry/sector but there need to be in-depth analysis carried out in terms of:

- i) Significant contribution to the company specifically on managerial practices,
- ii) Practical knowledge enhancement,
- iii) Problem solving both in terms of managerial and strategic implications.

This is necessary to ensure robustness of the findings leading to practical implications.

Replications of previous studies are allowed if there is contribution to knowledge from the industrial or organizational perspectives. Such replications must be relevant to the industrial needs.

There is still a need to establish novelty, but this may be seen from the angle of enhancing efficiency or effectiveness in the industry or organization and cost-saving possibilities that benefits the industry or organization.

2.3 Supervisor Nomination

Students can nominate their supervisors when they are in Semester 2. The nomination of the main supervisor and co-supervisor should be made through the UPTrack System (<https://uptracks.uitm.edu.my/>).

2.4 Defence of the Research Proposal (DRP)

DBA students need to go through the Defence of Research Proposal (DRP) and pass their DRP before they will be allowed to conduct the research. Students are expected to have their Defence of Research Proposal (DRP) at the earliest, after the completion of 3 semesters of their coursework.

The DRP will be evaluated as follows:

- i) The title/topic of the proposed study shall have some applied elements as the research domain of a DBA dissertation put emphasis on practices of management, marketing, operations management, finance, economics or any relevant disciplines in business.
- ii) The research problem for a DBA dissertation may be more specific in line with the needs of any relevant company or industry/sector.

2.5 Dissertation of the DBA

The DBA dissertation will be subjected to the following:

- i) A minimum total word of 50,000 and the dissertation must have a Similarity Index of below 30% before it can be submitted to examiners for examination.
- ii) Based on the program structure, the students can have their viva voce earliest in Semester 6.
- iii) For the viva-voce, two examiners will be appointed: one external from either local or foreign university and one internal examiner.
- iv) Examiners are to be made aware of the applied perspective of the problem statement and the relevant extent of the analysis in line with the depth of the applied problems identified.
- v) The dissertation shall primarily made up of the core research components (refer to APPENDIX A and APPENDIX B).
- vi) It is not necessary for DBA dissertation to place much emphasis on the research paradigms and the philosophical stand of the research for a DBA dissertation.
- vi) There is still a need for the assurance of scholarly contribution, but this may be in the form of testing established theories and the expansion of the application of theories in the work settings in relevant areas of business. If a qualitative method is used in the analysis, then such methods must be relevant to the need of the study. A case study for example, may employ relevant qualitative techniques of analysis which will lead to problem solving possibilities or conceptualization of models or frameworks.
- vii) The dissertation should emphasize on managerial implications of the research findings and not on theoretical extension. Thus, the final chapters of the DBA dissertation should be devoted to expressing managerial implications and not so much on theoretical contribution.

2.6 The Award of the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)

The results of the DBA will be in accordance to the following categories:

- i) Category 1: Pass without any amendments on the dissertation or any conditions placed upon it,
- ii) Category 2: Pass with Minor Corrections where the student has passed subject to minor amendments/corrections to the thesis as listed in the examiners' reports. The student is given 6 months to submit the final hardbound thesis.

- iii) Category 3(a): Pass with Major Corrections where the student has passed subject to major amendments/corrections to the thesis as listed in the examiners' reports. The corrections must be verified by the panel of examiners after changes/corrections are made. The student is given up to 12 months to resubmit the final hardbound without re-viva.
- iv) Category 3(b): Pass with major Corrections and Re-viva. The student undertakes major amendments/corrections to the thesis/dissertation as listed in the examiners' reports and the student must attend another viva-voce. The student is given up to 12 months to resubmit the final hardbound with re-viva.
- v) Category 4: Fail where the student is deemed to have failed the viva voce based on the thesis/dissertation evaluation report and is not allowed to re-submit.

Successful candidate who have completed the viva-voce and submitted the hardbound dissertation after verification from assigned examiner will be awarded the Doctor of Business Administration upon the endorsement of the university's Senate.

**Doctor of
Philosophy in
Business
Management
(PhD Mixed Mode)
[AA995]**

3. PhD Mixed Mode (AA995)

3.1 Program Background

This program is tailored to the needs of both practitioners and those in academia wishing to undertake a doctoral degree with the offering of an organized coursework specifically on research methodology. It is a program with the aim of providing structured methodological courses to assist students in carrying out high level research that are academically attune. This program differs from the DBA in terms of the research focus, the depth of analyses, the number of words on the thesis and the extent of assessment.

3.2 Focus of Study

Much like a PhD program by full research, the PhD Mixed Mode program at AAGBS expects students to carry out comprehensive research on topics that are both novel and contributing to knowledge enhancement. On this note, those in the PhD Mixed Mode program will be assessed differently from that of the DBA program.

The PhD theses mainly deal with issues or problems relating more to theoretical enhancement. The problem statement may begin with an applied problem, but this must be related to theoretical underpinnings, leading to the conceptualization of a theoretical framework.

The review of literature is comprehensive and clear identification of core and supporting theories must be present as these will be used to develop the theoretical framework.

3.3 Supervisor Nomination

Students can nominate their supervisors when they are in Semester 2. The nomination of the main supervisor and co-supervisor should be made through the UPTrack System (<https://uptracks.uitm.edu.my/>).

3.4 Defence of Research Proposal (DRP) for PhD Mixed Mode

Students under the PhD Mixed Mode program can have their Defence of Research Proposal (DRP) as early as the third semester after the completion of two semesters of

the coursework. As the course work are essentially courses on Research Methods and basic principles of methodology for research at the doctoral level, students can be ready to have their DRP in the third semester. Unlike the DBA, proposals under the PhD Mixed Mode program are expected to observe the following:

- i) To have titles or topics of studies that are driven by knowledge contribution. The research domain of a PhD Mixed Mode thesis is based on knowledge building and as such theoretical underpinnings are expected.
- ii) The proposal must discuss the methodology undertaken for the research extensively with the research paradigm firmly in place.
- iii) The PhD Mixed Mode proposal must address scholarly contribution and the extent that the study will contribute to the enhancement of knowledge.

3.5 Thesis of PhD Mixed Mode

The PhD Mixed Mode thesis will be subjected to the following:

- i) A minimum total word of 60,000 and the thesis must have a Similarity Index of below 30% before it can be submitted to examiners for examination.
- ii) Based on the program structure, the students can have their viva-voce earliest in Semester 6.
- iii) For the viva-voce, two examiners will be appointed: one external either from local or foreign university and one internal examiner.
- iv) Examiners need to understand the theoretical demand of the thesis and ensure that the problem statement and the analytical procedures used are in line with the depth of the problems identified as well as the contribution to knowledge.
- v) The thesis shall primarily made up of the core research components (refer to APPENDIX A and APPENDIX B).
- v) The research paradigms and the philosophical stand of the research need to be affirmed.
- vi) There is a need for the assurance of scholarly contribution in the form of testing established theories as well as theoretical enhancement through the contribution of new knowledge. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches may be used but these must be relevant to the need of the study and ensure that extension of knowledge is possible.
- vii) The final chapters of the PhD thesis should be devoted to expressing theoretical contribution and areas for future research.

3.6 The Award of the Doctor of Philosophy in Business Management

As with the DBA, the results of the PhD Mixed Mode will be in accordance to the following categories:

- i) Category 1: Pass without any amendments on the dissertation or any conditions placed upon it,
- ii) Category 2: Pass with Minor Corrections where the student has passed subject to minor amendments/corrections to the thesis as listed in the examiners' reports. The student is given 6 months to submit the final hardbound thesis.
- iii) Category 3(a): Pass with Major Corrections where the student has passed subject to major amendments/corrections to the thesis as listed in the examiners' reports. The corrections must be verified by the panel of examiners after changes/corrections are made. The student is given up to 12 months to resubmit the final hardbound without re-viva.
- iv) Category 3(b): Pass with major Corrections and Re-viva. The student undertakes major amendments/corrections to the thesis/dissertation as listed in the examiners' reports and the student must attend another viva-voce. The student is given up to 12 months to resubmit the final hardbound with re-viva.
- v) Category 4: Fail where the student is deemed to have failed the viva voce based on the thesis/dissertation evaluation report and is not allowed to re-submit.

4. SUMMARY OF THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DBA DISSERTATION & PhD MIXED MODE THESIS		
Components	DBA	PhD Mixed Mode
Focus of study	Applied perspectives. The program is meant for those from the Industry wishing to expand their scholarly stand through identification of issues and/or problem in the context of an organization or an industry/sector.	Basic or fundamental research. The program is meant for those in academia and the industry wishing for a knowledge enhancement perspective in the doctoral quest.
Problem statement establishment	Focuses on applied gaps and managerial implications of the study.	Focuses on theoretical gaps with emphasis on knowledge enhancement.
Literature review	The literature review must <u>identify gaps in practice</u> and allow for the conceptualization of the research framework that is in line with the need of the study.	Extensive literature review that <u>critically assess their relevance</u> towards developing a robust conceptual/theoretical research framework required by the study.
Length of dissertation/thesis	Minimum of 50,000 words (excluding references and appendices)	Minimum of 60,000 words (excluding references and appendices)
Contribution of study	Contribution to knowledge in the form of practical and managerial enhancement through theory/model testing or application	Contribution to knowledge in the form of theory enhancement through theory testing or theory development.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CORE COMPONENTS OF DBA DISSERTATION & PhD MIXED MODE THESIS - QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Chapter One: Introduction

- Background of the industry
- Background of the company-----> focus for DBA
- Background of the study (the issue)
- Problem statement
- Research gap (s)
- Research objectives & Research questions
- Significance of the study
- Scope of the study
- Definition of key terms

Chapter Two: Literature Review

- Underpinning theory (for PhD Mixed Mode)
- Application of the related theory (for DBA -> towards understanding its influence on the industry practices)
- Conceptualization of dependent variable (DV)
- Relationships of related variables with DV and the related hypothesis
- Development of framework and elaborations

Chapter Three: Methodology

- Research design (Purpose of study, research strategy, unit of analysis, time horizon)
- Sampling design (Population, sampling frame, sampling technique, sample size)
- Instrument (Structured questionnaire)
- Data collection methods
- Data analysis techniques

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

Chapter Five: Discussion

Chapter Six: Conclusion, Implications of Study, Future Research

APPENDIX B: CORE COMPONENTS OF DBA DISSERTATION & PhD MIXED MODE THESIS - QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Chapter One: Introduction

- Background of the Study (the focus of the phenomena)
- Problem statement
- Research gap(s) (*especially theoretical gaps as the relevance of adopting a qualitative method may lie with the inadequacy of existing theories. Qualitative studies are essentially theory building studies*)
- Research Questions (more on the 'How' and 'Why' questions) and Research Objectives (more on the exploratory or first level action verbs such as 'to explore', 'to determine' and 'to identify')
- Significance of the study
- Scope of the study (especially contextual scope as qualitative studies are contextually relevant)
- Definition of key terms

Chapter Two: Literature Review

- Theoretical base (theories that have some relevance but could not completely explain the phenomena being studied)
- Conceptualization of possible constructs for the study
- Elaboration on theoretical gaps and why qualitative study would be most appropriate
- Development of a conceptual framework or a depiction of a loose framework of possible constructs

Chapter Three: Methodology

- Qualitative research approach/es – the ones used in the study and justification for the use. – *Example: Case Study, Phenomenology, Ethnography, Grounded Theory or Document/Archival Analysis*
- Sampling technique – *Example: Theoretical Sampling, Open and Purposive sampling*
- Instrument used – *Example: Interview Guide/Protocol, Observation Checklist etc.*
- Data collection methods – *Example: Face-to-face interview, Focus group interview, Observation, Document and Archival data, etc.*
- Method of analysis - Coding process and analytical procedures. *Example: Constant Comparison Method, Content Analysis, Narrative Analysis, Discourse Analysis, etc.*

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

For Case Study, may discuss 'Within-Case Analysis', for Phenomenology may elaborate on interpretative method of lived experience.

Chapter Five: Discussion

(Theory Building/Model development)

For Case Study, may discuss 'Cross-Case Analysis', for Grounded Theory may discuss on theoretical development through thick description and emerging theory discussion, etc.

Chapter Six: Conclusion, Implications of Study, Future Research

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