**The *10 Strategic Points* for the Prospectus, Proposal, and Dissertation**

**Introduction**

In the Prospectus, Proposal and Dissertation there are **ten key or strategic points** that need to be **clear, simple, correct, and aligned** to ensure the research is **doable, valuable, and credible**. These points, which provide a guide or vision for the research, are present in almost any research. They are defined within this *10 Strategic Points* document.

**The 10 Strategic Points**

The 10 strategy points emerge from researching literature on a topic, which is based on, or aligned with, the defined need in the literature as well as the learner’s personal passion, future career purpose, and degree area. The *10 Strategic Points* document *includes* the following ten key or strategic points that define the research focus and approach:

1. Topic – Provides a broad research topic area/title.
2. Literature review - Lists primary points for four sections in the Literature Review: (a) Background of the problem/gap and the need for the study based on citations from the literature; (b) Theoretical foundations (models and theories to be foundation for study); (c) Review of literature topics with key theme for each one; (d) Summary.
3. Problem statement - Describes the problem to address through the study based on defined needs or gaps from the literature.
4. Sample and location – Identifies sample, needed sample size, and location (study phenomena with small numbers and variables/groups with large numbers).
5. Research questions – Provides research questions to collect data to address the problem statement.
6. Hypothesis/variables or Phenomena - Provides hypotheses with variables for each research question (quantitative) or describes the phenomena to be better understood (qualitative).
7. Methodology and design - Describes the selected methodology and specific research design to address problem statement and research questions.
8. Purpose statement – Provides one sentence statement of purpose including the problem statement, methodology, design, population sample, and location.
9. Data collection – Describes primary instruments and sources of data to answer research questions.
10. Data analysis – Describes the specific data analysis approaches to be used to address research questions.

**The Process for Defining the Ten Strategic Points**

The order of the ten strategic points listed above reflects the order in which the learner does the work. The first five strategic points focus primarily on defining the focus for the research based on a clearly defined need or gap from the literature as well as the learner’s passion, purpose and specialty area focus. First, a learner identifies a broad topic area to research for their dissertation based on a clearly defined need or gap from the literature -- that they are interested in because based on their personal passion, future career purpose, and degree. Second, the learner completes a review of the literature to define the need or gap they will address, the theories and models that will provide a foundation for their research, related topics to demonstrate their expertise in their field, and the key strategic points behind their proposed research. Third, the learner develops a clear, simple, one sentence problem statement that defines the problem, or gap, their research will address. Fourth, the learner identifies some potential target populations they would have access to in order to collect the data for the study, considering the fact the quantitative study sample sizes need to be much larger than those for qualitative studies. Fifth, the learner develops a set of research questions, which define the data needed to address the problem statement.

Based on the above five strategic points, the learner next defines the key aspects of the research methodology in the following five strategic points. Sixth, the learner either describes the phenomena to be studied (if it is a qualitative study), or develops a set of hypotheses (matching the research questions) that defines the variables that will be the focus for the research (if it is a quantitative study). Seventh, the learner determines if the study will be qualitative, quantitative or mixed research based on (a) the best approach for the research, (b) the size of the sample they can get permission to access, (c) availability of data collection tools and sources, and (d) time and resources to conduct the study. In addition, the learner selects the best design approach considering these same four factors. Eight, the learner develops a purpose statement by integrating the problem statement, methodology, design, sample, and location. Ninth, the learner identifies the data they will need to collect to address the research questions or hypotheses and how they will collect the data (e.g., interviews, focus groups, observations, tested and validated instruments or surveys, data bases, public media, etc.) Tenth, the learner identifies the appropriate data analysis steps, based on their design, to be used to answer their research questions and address their problem statement.

**Criteria for Evaluating the Ten Strategic Points: Clear, Simple, Correct and Aligned**

When developing research, it is important to define the ten strategic points so they are **simple,** **clear** and **correct** in order to ensure anyone who reviews them will easily understand them. It is important to **align** all of the ten strategic points to ensure it will be possible to conduct and complete the research. The problem statement must come out of the literature. The research questions must collect the data needed to answer the problem statement. The methodology and design must be appropriate for the problem statement and research questions. The data collection and data analysis must provide the information to answer the research questions (qualitative) or test the hypotheses (quantitative). Developing the *10 Strategic Points* as a two to three-page document can help ensure clarity, simplicity, correctness, and alignment of each of these ten key or strategic points in the prospectus, proposal, and dissertation. Developing these ten strategic points on a two to three pages also provides an easy-to-use use template to ensure the ten strategic points are always worded the same throughout the **prospectus, proposal, and dissertation.**

**Value of the *10 Strategic Points* Document**

The learner can use the *10 Strategic Points* document for communicating and aligning key stakeholders for the dissertation. The learner can also use the document to get agreement between the learner and the chair on the initial focus and approach for their research. The *10 Strategic Points* document is useful when reviewing the proposed research with the people or organizations where the learner needs to get permission to conduct their research. The learner needs to obtain this permission to conduct research, or site permission, before developing their Proposal. The document is useful for communicating the dissertation focus when attracting a Content Expert as well as for reviewing the proposal with the dissertation committee and the AQR reviewers. Further, submitting this document with the prospectus to the methodologist will assist in demonstrating to the methodologist the methodology, design, data collection, and data analysis align with the problem statement, research questions, and hypotheses or phenomena.

**Examples of the *10 Strategic Points* Document**

It is important that the ten strategic points are clear, concise, doable, and aligned throughout the prospectus, proposal, and dissertation. Following are samples for a quantitative study and a qualitative study. GCU does not recommend using a mixed method study, which requires the completion of a *10 Strategic Points* for both the quantitative and qualitative method. A mixed-methods study should not be proposed unless the learner has lots of extra time and resources to complete it. Additionally the learner must be able to do both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. A qualitative study with numbers or descriptive statistics does not mean it is mixed method study. Qualitative data can be displayed using tables, charts, graphs and descriptive statistics. Following the examples below, there is a table to use to develop your 10 Strategic Points.

**Example 1: Ten Strategic Points for a Quantitative Correlational Study:**

1. **Topic – Provides a broad research topic area/title:**  Relationship of Servant Leadership behaviors in principals, school culture, and student performance
2. **Literature review - Lists primary points for four sections in the Literature Review:**  **a. Background of the problem/gap; b. Theoretical foundations (models and theories to be foundation for study); c. Review of literature topics with key theme for each one; d. Summary**
   1. **Background of the problem/gap;** 
      1. The national call for school accountability is a critical issue that has gained attention from federal educational lawmakers given the rate at which American students are falling behind other countries influenced federal lawmakers in the creation of the NCL Act (Koretz, 2009).
      2. The school principal of the twenty first century has been asked to do and be competent in more and more tasks than the previous two centuries of school principals including improving student performance and the school culture (Kafka, 2009).
      3. The characteristics of school culture are complex, and a leader must understand these complex variables before they create change with the school (MacNeil et al., 2009).
      4. Black (2010), who conducted a mixed method study showing relationship of servant leadership and school climate, suggest additional studies in this arrea.
      5. Pritchard et al. (2005) explored the relationships between district and school culture and student achievement.
   2. **Theoretical foundations (models and theories to be foundation for study);**
      1. Servant leadership model (Greenleaf, 1977; Patterson 2003)
      2. School culture models (MacNeil, 2009; Schein, 1985)
      3. Broad set of studies exploring relationship among these two models and performance in school. (Halawah, 2005; MacNeil et al.,2009)
   3. **Review of literature topics with key theme for each one;** 
      1. **National Agenda:** Need to improve the performance of students in schools to be competitive as a nation (Koretz, 2009).
      2. **Changing Role of Principal**: The role of the principal in American schools has changed dramatically from its beginnings of uniformed education (Rousmaniere, 2007).
      3. **Servant Leadership in Principals Leads to More Effective leaders:** The study used the Self-Assessment for Servant Leadership Profile (SALS) to assess whether or not a leader was a servant leader and the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) to assess principal effectiveness. (Taylor et al., 2007).
      4. **Principal’s Behavior Influence School Culture:** The principal’s influence on school culture has an indirect effect on organizational and cultural factors of a school (MacNeil et al., 2009).
      5. **School Culture Influences Student Performance:** A strong relationship exists between school culture and student performance (McCoach et al., 2004).
      6. **Measuring Servant Leadership Behaviors:** About 10 validated/tested Instruments exist to measure Servant Leadership Behaviors some of which have been used in schools
      7. **Measuring Culture:** Validated/tested instruments to measure culture exist and have been used in schools.
      8. **Measuring Student Performance:** State Test Scores are a standardized way to measure student performance used across all schools in a state.
      9. **Methodology:** The primary design from the Literature Review used to evaluate relationship between Servant Leadership and variables such as culture, climate, and performance has been correlational.
   4. **Summary.**
      1. Gap/problem: There is a need to identify different approaches to improve student performance
      2. Prior studies: Prior studies show various relationships between two of the three variables (servant leadership behaviors, culture and student performance) with only one exploring all three
      3. Quantitative study: Instruments and sources of data exist to collect numerical data on the three variables
      4. Significance: research will add to the broad area of correlating leadership, culture and performance; research may identify specific approaches to be use by school leadership to improve student performance
3. **Problem statement - Describes the phenomena to study (qualitative) or variables/groups (quantitative) to study**, **in one sentence:** *It is not known* if there is a relationship between the level of a principal’s servant leadership behaviors and characteristics as perceived by teachers in principals, the school culture as perceived by teachers, and level of student performance.
4. **Sample and location – Identifies sample, needed sample size, and location (study phenomena with small numbers and variables/groups with large numbers).**
5. Location: Alaska
6. Population: All schools in rural Alaska
7. Sample: One district in rural Alaska with approximately 20 principals who each lead a single school
8. Number of observations for each principal in the sample: There are 5 to 10 teachers in each school all of whom will be asked to complete the instruments on the principal
9. **Research questions – Provides research questions to collect data to answer the problem statement:** R1: Is there a relationship between teacher-perceived principal servant leadership characteristics and teacher-perceived school culture? R2: Is there a relationship between teacher-perceived principal servant leadership characteristics and student achievement? R3: Is there a relationship between teacher-perceived school culture and student achievement?
10. **Hypothesis/variables or Phenomena - Provides hypotheses with variables for each research question (quantitative) or describes the phenomena to be better understood (qualitative).**
11. H1: There is a significant relationship between a principal’s servant leadership characteristics as perceived by teachers and measured by the SLAI and teacher-perceived secondary school culture as measured by the SCS.
12. H10: There is not a significant relationship between a principal’s servant leadership characteristics as perceived by teachers and measured by the SLAI and teacher-perceived secondary school culture as measured by the SCS.
13. H2A: There is a significant relationship between the principal’s servant leadership characteristics as perceived by teachers and as measured by SLAI and student achievement measured by the SIVS.
14. H2A0: There is not a significant relationship between the principal’s servant leadership characteristics as perceived by teachers and as measured by SLAI and student achievement measured by the SIVS.
15. H3A: There is a significant relationship between teacher perceived secondary school culture as measured by the SCS and student achievement as measured by the SIVS.
16. H3A0: There is a significant relationship between teacher perceived secondary school culture as measured by the SCS and student achievement as measured by the SIVS.
17. **Methodology and design - Describes the selected methodology and specific research design to address problem statement and research questions:** This study will use a Quantitative Methodology with a Correlation Design
18. **Purpose statement – Provides one sentence statement of purpose including the problem statement, sample, methodology, and design:**  The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to develop an understanding of the relationships between secondary school principals’ teacher-perceived servant leadership, teacher-perceived school culture, and student achievement in all of the schools in the Lower Kuskokwim School District.
19. **Data collection – Describes primary instruments and sources of data to answer research questions:**
20. Independent variable: Level of principal’s servant leadership characteristics /behaviors: Data will be collected using one of the standard instruments/surveys that measure the Servant Leadership Style by measuring level of servant leadership characteristics in 6-10 dimensions currently used for similar studies (Dennis and Bocarnea; 2005)
21. Dependent variable: Level of culture in the school: : Data will be collected using one of the standard instruments/surveys currently used for similar studies that measure School Culture by measuring the different dimensions of climate (MacNeil et al., 2009).
22. Dependent Variable: Student performance will be measured by the state/school standardized test scores (SIVS).
23. **Data analysis – Describes the specific data analysis approaches to be used to address research questions.**
24. Descriptive statistics to summarize the sample demographic data and the data on the three variables
25. A test for univariate outliers to determine if any cases may not statistically be part of the sample collected.
26. A test the assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity
27. Inferential statistics for testing linear regression for the three hypotheses

**Example 2: Ten Strategic Points for a Quantitative Causal Comparative Study:**

1. **Topic – Provide a broad research topic area/title:** Impact of teacher collaboration within Mathematics PLCs on Texas state math assessments
2. **Literature review - List primary points for four sections in the Literature Review: a. Background of the problem/gap; b. Theoretical foundations (models and theories to be foundation for study); c. Review of literature topics with key theme for each one; d. Summary**
3. Introduction and Background
   1. Gap exists in tactics that contribute to improved performance in mathematics state test scores especially for low SES Hispanic students (NCES, 2010). .
   2. Opportunity to quantity the relationships between collaboration in teachers and higher state mathematics test scores (DuFour, 2011).
4. Theoretical Foundation
   1. Models of collaboration (Naughton, 2006).
   2. Models of high performing schools (Sanders, 2010; Wilson, 2011),
5. Review of Literature topics with key theme:
   1. Trends in Education at the National & State Level: Gaps exist in the performance on state mathematics tests (NCES, 2010)
   2. Characteristics of the Low SES Student Population: Although performance gaps continue to be higher for some high minority low SES schools (NCES, 2010), others are high performing or excelling schools on state test results (Jensen, 2009; Dyson, H. 2008). .
   3. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): PLCs are being established with departments to improve collaboration and identify tactics to improve student performance (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006).
   4. Teacher Collaboration: Collaboration has been shown to contribute to school and student success in qualitative but not quantitative studies (Piccardi, 2005; Erkens, 2008; DuFour, 2011).
   5. Teacher Collaboration (independent variable) can be measured using a tested and validated instrument (dependent variable) (Naughton, 2006); Student Achievement can be measured using mathematics results on state test scores
   6. Methodology: Quantitative causal comparative design: The study will use a causal comparative design to compare two groups as has been done in prior studies
6. Synthesis/Summary
   1. Background: There is Need to Close the Mathematics Achievement Gap
   2. Gap/Problem: Demonstrate relationship between collaboration in PLC and mathematics achievement in high minority low SES grade schools
   3. PLCs: The Way to Implement Change is through Collaboration through PLCs
   4. Collaboration: Collaboration is a mean to Impact Student Achievement
   5. Final Thoughts
7. **Problem statement - Explain the phenomena to study (qualitative) or variables/groups (quantitative) to study, in one sentence**: It is unknown what differences exist, if any, in the levels of perceived teacher collaboration within PLCs in schools identified as high performing versus those reported at low performing schools, which serve both a high percentage of low SES students and Hispanic students, on state math assessment.
8. **Sample and location – Identify sample, needed sample size, and location (study phenomena with small numbers and variables/groups with large numbers):** Need at least 30 grade schools that are high performing and 30 that are low performing on state mathematics test scores in the state of Texas. Schools need to have established PLCs for mathematics.
9. **Research questions – Provide research questions to collect data to answer the problem statement:** R1: What differences exist, if any, between the levels of perceived teacher collaboration within PLCs in schools identified by the state of Texas as high performing versus those perceived at low performing schools that serve both, a high percentage of low SES and Hispanic students, on state math assessment?
10. **Hypothesis/variables or Phenomena - Develop Hypotheses with variables for each research question (quantitative) or describe the phenomena to be better understood (qualitative)** Compare high performing schools on their state test scores in mathematics (group 1) to low performing schools (group 2) on their perceived level of collaboration in the mathematics PLCs.
11. HA: There would be a significant difference between the levels of perceived teacher collaboration within PLCs in schools identified by the state of Texas as high performing versus those perceived at low performing that serve both, a high percentage of low SES and Hispanic students, on state math assessment.
12. H0: There would be no significant difference between the levels of perceived teacher collaboration within PLCs in schools identified by the state of Texas as high performing versus those perceived at low performing that serve both, a high percentage of low SES and Hispanic students, on state math assessment.
13. **Methodology and design - Describe the selected methodology and specific research design to address problem statement and research questions:** Quantitative methodology with a causal comparative research design
14. **Purpose statement – Provide one sentence statement of purpose including problem statement, sample, methodology, and design**: The purpose of this causal comparative quantitative study is to examine to what extent the level of teacher collaboration within Mathematics PLCs is a factor that may influence the mathematics achievement level on the Texas mathematics assessment of elementary schools identified as 'high performing' or 'low performing', and serving a majority of low SES and Hispanic students.
15. **Data collection – Describe primary instruments and sources of data to answer research questions:** For the independent variable, this study will use the Mathematics Staff Interaction Questionnaire (MSIQ) developed by Naughton (2006). To measure the dependent variable, the researcher will use archival data (provided by the district’s Research Review Board office) for each elementary school in one North Texan school district to differentiate schools based on achievement level as indicated by the 2011 Texas mathematics assessment.
16. **Data analysis – Describe the specific data analysis approaches to be used to address research questions:** A priori analysis will be used to justify the sample size. Descriptive statistics will describe the sample characteristics and variable results. An independent t-test will test for difference between the two groups of 30 schools (high performing versus low performing on mathematics) on level of collaboration.

**Example 3: Ten Strategic Points for a Qualitative Case Study:**

1. **Topic – Provides a broad research topic area/title:**  A Case Study of how a comprehensive global programme, the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme, influences the success of a single middle school.
2. **Literature review - Lists primary points for four sections in the Literature Review:**  **a. Background of the problem/gap; b. Theoretical foundations (models and theories to be foundation for study); c. Review of literature topics with key theme for each one; d. Summary.**
   1. **Background of the problem/gap:**
      1. Prior studies which show a relationship between achievement in mathematics and literacy and taking a language identified need to study how taking a foreign language leads, especially in immersion programs, to higher levels of cognitive development as reflected in higher scores in mathematics and literacy (Stewart, 2008).
      2. Dr. Celestine Gail Carr (1994) concluded that further studies on the effects of foreign language studies on vocabulary, mathematical concepts, and mathematical computations examining for a correlation between foreign language aptitude and mathematical aptitude at the middle school level.
      3. Dr. Carolyn Joyce Taylor-Ward (2003) identified the need for future sties on relationship between studying elementary school foreign language and academic achievement on state test scores.
   2. **Theoretical Foundations (models and theories to be foundation for study);**

Lev Vygotsky, a pioneer in developmental psychology researched the development of language and its relationship to thought (Vygotsky, 1986). Vygotsky studied cognitive development and its relationship to the role of social interaction with the environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky proposed that language, along with environmental social interaction helps a child to learn to reason (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning a foreign language is a social activity that involves a learner’s interaction with the environment and their teacher. Vygotsky’s model supports the assumption that cognitive development transfers in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). The International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program provides a medium for which a More Knowledgeable Other and the Zone of Proximal Development take place. Learners demonstrate through interaction in organized debates, hands-on experimentation projects, investigations, and problem solving activities.

* 1. **Review of literature topics with key theme for each one;**
  2. **Historical Events**: Historically, there have been laws enacted, government initiatives, and global events that have driven the need for support of a global education as well as improved performance in basic areas such as mathematics and literacy within the United States of America.
  3. **National Security**: Today’s global realities make it imperative for the United States to adapt a global perspective including learning foreign languages as a priority for U.S. national security and to help the U.S. remain a global leader.
  4. **Global Literacy**: There are high performing schools that have comprehensive global learning programs, which have contributed to students’ cognitive development and resulting improvements of national and state standardized test scores.
  5. **Cognitive Development:** Empirical research shows that a relationship exists between cognitive development, comprehensive global learning, and student success in areas such as mathematics and literacy.
  6. **Qualitative Case Study Design:** Prior studies on this program have been predominately correlational and focused on determine the impact of the program. However, an in-depth understanding of how this program may be influencing student performance is missing. A case study is an ideal approach to understand the causal relationships within complex phenomena (Yin, 2014).
  7. **Summary.**

1. United States priority for global literacy to be competitive and secure.
2. Learning foreign languages leads to improved cognitive development and student performance.
3. Gap in terms of additional research needed to examine these findings.
4. Case study design is ideal for understanding causal relationships within complex phenomena.
5. **Problem statement - Describes the phenomena to study (qualitative) or variables/groups (quantitative) to study**, **in one sentence:** It is not known how the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme influences the success of a single middle school in the state of Georgia.
6. **Sample and location – Identifies sample, needed sample size, and location (study phenomena with small numbers and variables/groups with large numbers).**
7. *Location:* The state of Georgia of the United States of America.
8. *Target Population:* A school district with over 25 schools.
9. *Sample:* A single middle school that uses the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme and has over 500 students.
10. **Research questions – Provides research questions to collect data to answer the problem statement:** 
    1. *R1*: What is the nature and structure of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme?
    2. *R2*: How does the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme impact school success including Annual Yearly Progress?
    3. *R3:* What factors of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme contribute to cognitive development?
    4. *R4:* What factors of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme contribute to global literacy?
    5. *R5:* How does the leadership of an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme contribute to a schools’ success?
    6. *R6*: How is the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme evaluated?
11. **Hypothesis/variables or Phenomena - Provides hypotheses with variables for each research question (quantitative) or describes the phenomena to be better understood (qualitative).**
12. *Phenomenon:* Understanding the nature and impact of an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme in a single middle school in the state of Georgia on global literacy and improvement in cognitive development as well as mathematics and literacy performance.
13. **Methodology and design - Describes the selected methodology and specific research design to address problem statement and research questions:** The methodology is qualitative. The design is a single case study of a single program and how it influences a single middle school.
14. **Purpose:** The purpose of the qualitative single case study is to determine how the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme influences the success of a single middle school in the state of Georgia.
15. **Data collection – Describes primary instruments and sources of data to answer research questions:**
16. The researcher will get an overview of the International Baccalaureate Programme through the website provided by the International Baccalaureate.
17. The investigator will look at the Georgia Department of Education’s public database to determine if state standardized test scores of this single middle school show success in performance and other dimensions of performance that display on the public database.
18. The investigator will interview the founders of and curriculum developers of the International Baccalaureate to understand focus of program and how it develops global literacy and may lead to improved cognitive development reflected in mathematics and literacy scores on state tests.
19. The investigator will interview the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme school-based principal, programme coordinator, and foreign language teachers.
20. Media, curriculum (designer and school based), and evaluation reports about International Baccalaureate Programme will contribute to the study.
21. The researcher will look at factors of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (curriculum, reports, interviews with developers and the school-based principal) that contributes to cognitive development and global literacy.
22. **Data analysis – Describes the specific data analysis approaches to be used to address research questions.**
23. Data will be organized and prepared for analysis.
24. Descriptive statistics will summarize the data.
25. Coding will generate themes to address the research questions.
26. A narrative and visual summary of the case study will be developed across the research questions.

**Table to Use to Complete your 10 Strategic Points**

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | My degree is (pick one) Ed.D. Ph.D. DBA  My program emphasis is: | |
|  | **Ten Strategic Points** | **Comments or Feedback** |
| Broad Topic Area (This must include a clear description of how your topic aligns with your degree and emphasis) |  |  |
| Lit Review |  |  |
| Problem Statement |  |  |
| Research Questions |  |  |
| Sample |  |  |
| Describe Phenomena (qualitative) or Define Variables/Hypotheses (quantitative) |  |  |
| Methodology & Design |  |  |
| Purpose Statement |  |  |
| Data Collection Approach |  |  |
| Data Analysis Approach |  |  |

**Only a dissertation Chair can give formal approval of a topic. Submitting this document and receiving feedback from your course instructor does not constitute receiving approval to conduct this research from your Chair.**