

BOOK REVIEW: *A GUIDE TO MASTERING RESEARCH: YOUR ROADMAP TO ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE*, BY MOUNIR BENYOUSSEF, AUTHOR'S EDITION [E-BOOK], 2024

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Any teacher facing a graduate or undergraduate class knows that academic writing does not come easy to students. Preparing a final dissertation, or even a few-thousand-page paper, is probably one of the most intimidating aspects of higher education. Despite the “help” provided by artificial intelligence, coming up with a suitable topic, conducting relevant research, and organising and developing ideas organically in a text may appear as unsurmountable difficulties. Moreover, as already pointed out more than twenty-five years ago (Lea & Street, 1998), students’ levels of academic literacy are also decreasing – in spite of today’s ready availability of bibliographical sources through the internet, students’ familiarity with academic literature is still low, as well as their ability to assess its credibility.

Higher-education institutions have tried to tackle the issue by, among other strategies, providing specific training in academic writing (ISCAP has offered a workshop tailored for master’s students since 2021), publishing guidelines and tips on their websites, and including classic texts like those of Creswell (2018) or Booth *et al.* (2016) as mandatory reading. Despite the abundance of material and resources, however, Mounir Benyoussef, a Professor at Casablanca’s Hassan II University, decided to take matters into his own hands and published this much welcomed handbook – a clear, down-to-earth, easy-to-use guide for novel researchers.

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A Guide to Mastering Research: Your Roadmap to Academic Excellence is organised in eight chapters, covering in all 178 pages. Considering that there is hardly a page without an image and that the book also contains over a hundred hyperlinks to videos and other external resources, it looks at first rather short for its intended purpose, i.e., to provide step-by-step guidelines through the meanders of academic research. Benyoussef, however, never loses sight of his target audience and, instead of delving into long theoretical or methodological discussions, likely to put off students under the pressure of many assignments and tight schedules, manages to offer concise, to-the-point descriptions, suggestions and tips.

Chapter 1, “Unlocking the meaning of research”, serves as an introductory exploration into the concept of research. After offering a brief definition of research, the chapter introduces key terms and concepts essential to grasping the research process. Terms like *analysis*, *methodology*, and *theory* are clearly defined, providing a solid vocabulary foundation for new researchers. This glossary serves as a quick reference and ensures that readers are familiar with the fundamental language of research. Benyoussef also injects humour into the discussion, presenting whimsical definitions of research that depict the often arduous journey of a researcher. This light-hearted approach makes the text more relatable and enjoyable, setting the tone for what comes next.

Chapter 2, “Overview of various types of research”, contains a comprehensive classification of research types based on methodology, the knowledge they aim to uncover, and the specific research problems they investigate. The chapter categorises research into several types, such as descriptive, analytical, fundamental, conceptual and empirical, among others, illustrating each type with specific examples relevant to Morocco, the author’s homeland. Further distinctions are made between qualitative and quantitative research, highlighting their purposes, data collection methods, analysis techniques, sample sizes, and findings. The chapter concludes by addressing mixed methods research, combining both

qualitative and quantitative approaches for comprehensive insights, and provides practical tips for designing effective questionnaires.

Chapter 3, "Choosing the Right Topic", touches on a crucial step in the research process, as students are often at a loss when it comes to selecting a sizable, manageable topic for their assignments. Here, Benyoussef goes through a list of steps leading to the choice of a suitable topic, as well as a description of the most usual techniques to generate ideas, such as brainstorming and mind mapping (including tools like MindMup, Coggle, FreeMind, and Xmind). The chapter also provides three detailed examples of research topics in the humanities, literary studies and sociology, specifying their possible objectives, key components, conclusions and recommendations, and ends with a comprehensive list of funding organisations, from Moroccan foundations to international organisations like Google research scholarships and the EU scholarship scheme. Overall, chapter 3 serves as a detailed roadmap for researchers to select a well-defined and impactful research topic, incorporating both traditional methods and modern tools like AI for idea generation and refinement.

Chapter 4, "Finding Adequate Research Materials and References", guides university students and researchers in locating credible academic sources, highlighting the importance of using peer-reviewed and expert-vetted materials. The chapter emphasises the need for time, effort, and sometimes financial resources to access high-quality scholarly sources. It offers a comprehensive list of them, including university libraries, online academic databases (like JSTOR and Google Scholar), citation databases (such as Web of Science and Scopus), Google Books, library catalogues (like WorldCat), open access journals, online forums, data repositories, and digital libraries. The chapter also discusses primary research methods like interviews and surveys, the role of librarians, social media, professional organisations, bookstores, and eBooks. A key section introduces the CRAAP test for evaluating sources based on Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose. The importance of proper

citation is underscored for giving credit, supporting claims, allowing verification, and establishing credibility. Citation styles (APA, MLA, and Chicago) are explained, and links to tutorials provided. The chapter concludes by recommending digital citation management tools like Zotero, EndNote, and Mendeley to help manage references and ensure consistency.

In chapter 5, "Outlining/Planning/Monitoring Your Research Project", emphasis is given to the elaboration of a structured plan for dissertation writing, in order to ensure comprehensive and coherent coverage of the research topic. In addition, the chapter deals with the elements making up the main sections, i.e., introduction, methodology, literature review, results and conclusions. The chapter highlights the structure of the final draft, including the title page, abstract, acknowledgments, table of contents, list of abbreviations, references/bibliography, and appendices. It also underscores the importance of time management in research projects, advocating for meticulous scheduling and progress monitoring to prevent procrastination and ensure efficient resource use, offering time management tips specifically tailored for researchers and students.

Chapter 6, "Insights on Future Trends in Research", explores the dynamic landscape of research, driven by technological advancements, societal shifts, and expanding knowledge frontiers. It identifies three primary areas influencing future research: emerging technologies (including the revolution introduced by artificial intelligence and machine learning), open science and collaborative research, and ethical considerations related to these trends, such as privacy concerns, cultural sensitivity and biases in AI.

Chapter 7, "Facts and figures about research", provides an extensive overview of research and development (R&D) expenditures and trends across various countries, thus falling slightly outside the book's main scope. Though focusing mainly on the Moroccan context, this chapter also highlights other countries' R&D investments, with specific sections devoted to Israel and Singapore, and references to European and African countries. This

detailed examination of global R&D spending illustrates varying levels of commitment and investment in scientific research and technological advancement across different regions, reflecting both the achievements and ongoing challenges in the global research landscape.

Finally, chapter 8 delves into the realm of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), offering a comprehensive overview of their evolution, characteristics, and impact on education. The chapter begins with a presentation on how platforms like Duolingo use addictive social media techniques to enhance learning engagement, highlighting the potential for MOOCs to revolutionise autonomous online learning. Additionally, the chapter lists several recommended MOOCs for research skills development, devised by institutions such as the University of Queensland, EdinburghX or Coventry University, thus illustrating the transformative impact of MOOCs on education, and stressing their role in making high-quality learning accessible and flexible.

All the chapters also include interactive elements, such as QR codes linking to videos that further elucidate the concepts discussed, thus enhancing the reader's experience and providing access to additional content. The high number of multimedia resources, however (more than a hundred), poses challenges related to their potential for distraction, the reliance on external content quality and reliability, and accessibility issues. It is, nevertheless, a useful and engaging text, that should become recommended reading for Portuguese students. They can gain significant value from reading the book despite its focus on Moroccan examples. The global perspective, transferable research skills, and increased cultural awareness are strong benefits and may spark productive research ideas. However, supplementing the book with additional materials and examples from the Portuguese context may ensure that the content is fully relevant and applicable.

Overall, *A Guide to Mastering Research* is a comprehensive, engaging, and practical resource that provides students with essential skills to get started in the hard, but rewarding, world of academic and scientific research.

References

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