

STANDARDS FOR PHD AND MASTER’S THESIS, MASTER’S DISSERTATION AND MASTER’S PROJECT.

Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

All postgraduate students in any programme or mode of study at the Faculty of Education are required to engage in research activities within their postgraduate studies. All student research activities involve a substantial piece of individual work undertaken with guidance from a designated supervisor. The expectations on the depth of research vary between the different levels and mode of programme. Below are the different research activities available for the different degree and mode of postgraduate programmes:

Degree/ mode	Research Activity
Master (Taught Course)	Research Study (Master’s Project)
Master (Mixed Mode)	Dissertation
Master (Research)	Master’s Thesis
PhD (Research)	PhD Thesis

Research Study (Master’s Project)

Research Study or Master’s Project is the final project for the taught course master’s degree. It is an advanced research project of a defined scope and length. Those pursuing a taught course master’s degree must perform research on a specific topic that demonstrates their knowledge acquired through their program.

A master’s project is more closely related to a research project that you would have completed during undergraduate degree but in a more critical and in depth manner. It should demonstrate your level of critical and analytical thinking and defines the subject that you are most interested in pursuing within your field. A good master’s project is a proof that the candidate understands and able to apply the knowledge and skills of their field, research methodology and data analyses. A master’s project is not required to be an original contribution to knowledge, though it may be. A master’s project is typically between 80 -100 pages.

In Research Study I, students complete a minimum of 3 chapters (proposal) which should cover discussions pertaining to the problem of research, literature review and methodology. Student’s proposal is assessed only by the student’s supervisor(s). Research Study II is the continuation of Research Study I and the complete report of the master’s project is assessed by the student’s supervisor(s) as well as another examiner (another lecturer from within the student’s programme). Grades for Research Study I and II are counted in the student’s CGPA.

Master's Dissertation

Master's dissertation is the research practice for mixed mode master's students. Students pursuing master's degree by mixed mode need to complete all courses before registering for dissertation.

A master's dissertation is similar to a master's project. Students need to perform research on a defined scope related to their field and demonstrate their knowledge acquired through their program. However, a dissertation requires students to be able to demonstrate ability to critically discuss issues and relevant literature substantiated with sufficient evidence.

Student's dissertation is assessed at two stages via oral evaluations: 1) proposal assessment and 2) viva voce, involving internal examiners only. Proposal assessment and viva voce can be administered in the same semester, depending on student's progress. A master's dissertation is typically between 40,000-50,000 words.

Master's Thesis

A master's thesis needs to be completed to fulfill the requirements for the award of a pure research master's degree (MPhil). A master's thesis is different from a master's dissertation in terms of the depth of research and the extent of literature covered. The literature reviewed should be extensive and must reflect scholarship of learning in the student's research topic as well as the student's field of study.

The assessment for a master's thesis is much more rigorous than for a master's dissertation. A master's thesis would require a more in depth and critical analyses of the current literature related to the student's topic of research. A master's thesis enriches the body of knowledge of the field of education through analyzing, applying, clarifying, critiquing and interpreting the specific body of knowledge concerned. The recommended length of a master's thesis is between 50,000-60,000 words (MQA Education Program Standard, 2015).

A master's thesis is also assessed at two stages via oral evaluations: 1) proposal assessment and 2) viva voce. Proposal assessment will involve at least two internal examiners but an external examiner will also be involved the viva voce. Proposal assessment and viva voce cannot be taken in the same semester.

PhD Thesis

Similar to a master's thesis, a PhD thesis also requires the demonstration of an extensive academic research and the evidence of capacity for critical analysis in the student's field. However, a PhD thesis must also take into consideration the expectation of originality in the field and the input of some relevant new information or ideas to the field of study (contribution to knowledge). The literature review of a PhD thesis should be exhaustive. The research of others serves as a guide to come up with a completely new hypothesis. Academic requirements for a PhD thesis, especially the demand of originality, are much higher than for a master's thesis. A PhD thesis must contribute something completely new and undiscovered to the student's field.

The general criteria applied in assessing a master's thesis are applied in assessing a PhD thesis, but much more rigorously. A PhD thesis is assessed specifically against the basic requirement, that a PhD thesis be an original contribution to knowledge. Usually a PhD thesis covers a wider field, or at least shows a greater sense of perspective, than does the a master's thesis, and one would expect a PhD candidate to show an awareness of basic theoretic problems directly or indirectly relevant to his or her particular topic. The authority underlying the thesis (the extent to which candidates reveal an extensive as well as intensive knowledge of their subject) is another criterion implicit in one's assessment of a doctoral candidate and a pointer to the quality of such a candidate's scholarship. PhD candidates must present a significant and substantial piece of research; this will be interpreted as requiring some stature, breadth, and conviction in literary argument. A PhD thesis is usually at least double the length of a master's dissertation or thesis, with the recommended length of 80,000 (minimum) to 100,000 words.

**GUIDELINE FOR WHAT MUST BE INCLUDED IN A PROPOSAL REPORT
(Applicable for Master’s dissertation, Master’s thesis and PhD thesis)**

The objective of proposal assessments is to ensure that students are heading to the right direction in their research. Besides assessing to determine whether students have reached the level expected for a certain level of study, a proposal assessment also serves as a platform for students to improve and strengthen their research.

The assessment of a proposal is based on the proposal report as well as student’s oral defense. Students should be able to explain their research well in writing and/or orally (the expectations for each content are listed below).

Students’ proposal can be written and submitted in accordance with the minimum standard of 30-40 pages as endorsed by the faculty JKA.

Content	Expectations
Title	Must reflect the research in one concise statement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not exceeding 15 words - No abbreviations or semi colons etc - Involve all main variables
Chapter 1	
Introduction	General view of the focus area of study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - philosophical view - scenario - purpose of study
Background of Study	Argument leading to the research problem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlight research gap - Discussion of the arguments should be able to answer questions of ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘why’, ‘who’ (5Ws) - Contemporary issues - Research gap - Evidence and support (data)
Statement of Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlight Research gap - Statement that reflects the research topic, variables and objectives of the study.
Research Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must relate to the background - Must be educational and research setting - Objectives should be viable and do-able
Research Questions	Matched with the objectives of the study and must be written in question forms.
Hypothesis	Depends on the requirement of the research
Importance of the study	Contribution of the study to the researched population/ people involved in the study, stakeholders, area(s) of study or knowledge discipline
Scope and limitation of the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scope : the areas of study; - Limitation : sampling, location/place of research, statistical methods

Theoretical and conceptual framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conceptual framework is a must but theoretical framework is optional (depending on the nature of the research) - Frameworks need to be presented in the form of diagrams and explained in relation to the study. - Must relate with the research objectives and aligned with the measures used in the study
Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All variables/ constructs studied must be defined : conceptual and operational definitions for each word/ phrase - Operational definitions of variables must align with the theory and instrument used in the study
Chapter 2	
Preview and review of related literature : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further discussions on main concepts/ variables • Discussions of relevant theories/ models – particularly the ones that are used in the theoretical framework • Review of previous research related to the objectives of the current study • Literature must include recent publications unless the studies are really significant / rare. • Must be able to demonstrate ability to critically analyse the literature • Must include in text citations 	
Chapter 3	
Research design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explanation and justification of the research design and approach - The research design should be able to lead to the investigation that can answer the research questions.
Population and sample	Descriptions and justifications of population, number of sample/ participants and sampling method <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of diagrams to illustrate is highly recommended
Instrumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instrument(s) used - Validity and reliability of the instruments - Instruments/tools/inventory/ intervention program
Data collection procedure	The technical and ethical measures taken in data collection.
Data analysis	Explanation and justification of the technique of analyses planned to be used to answer the research questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Software / tools planned to be used
Research planning	Planning of research until completion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gantt chart (duration) is recommended