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The Significance of the Abstract in Academic Research

A B S T R A C T

An abstract is a concise summary of the entire article, providing a brief overview of the background, purpose, methodology, results, and conclusions. It serves as a snapshot of the study, enabling readers, editors, and journals' chief editors to quickly assess its relevance and decide whether to read the full article. The fact that most of the universities' professors suffer from this is that most of the scientific journals indexed in Scopus refuse their works to be published. This is due to missing data which are criteria of the APA style (7th edition). This study aims to investigate the university professors' awareness of the abstract content, the most abstracts missing elements in Iraqi works, and the correlation between master thesis abstracts' content and university professors' awareness of the abstract content. To achieve the aims of the study, the following questions were set:

- 1- To what extent do the university professors aware of the abstract elements?
 - 2- What are the most missing data in the abstract of the master's thesis?
 - 3- Is there a correlation between master thesis abstracts' content and university professors' awareness of the abstract content?
- The outcomes of the study are significant for the Iraqi university instructors, postgraduate students, scholars, and researchers to write a comprehensive, well-organized, and cohesive abstract that acts as a mirror of the scientific work. The study is qualitative and quantitative in nature, to collect the qualitative data a sample consisting of 6 university professors who volunteered to participate in the study was interviewed by conducting a semi-structured interview. In addition, to collect the quantitative data a sample consisting of 15 master theses were chosen randomly from 5 universities. Frequencies, percentages, and Pearson's correlation matrix were used to analyze the data. The results revealed that the university professors' replies agreed on the most common items that an abstract should contain, which were the introduction, the aims, the purpose, the instrument, and the results. The university professors did not mention that an abstract should contain a problem of a study, the methodology, and the conclusion. All the participants are unaware of the criteria that an abstract should include. In addition, most of the master theses' abstracts miss the methodology, the problem/ gap, and the conclusion. Finally, the results revealed that there is a positive correlation between the master thesis abstracts' content and university professors' awareness of the abstract content. The university professors' awareness is due to the overlap between the functions of the abstract content. Also, the master theses' missing data are due to the student's imitation of previous theses and the supervisor's awareness of the criteria of the APA style 7th edition. In light of the results, some recommendations were suggested. © 2023 JTUH, College of Education for Human Sciences, Tikrit University

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أهمية الملخص في البحث الأكاديمي

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الخلاصة:

الملخص هو ملخص موجز للمقالة بأكملها ، ويقدم لمحة موجزة عن الخلفية والغرض والمنهجية والنتائج والاستنتاجات. إنه بمثابة لقطة سريعة للدراسة ، مما يمكن القراء والمحررين ورؤساء تحرير المجالات من تقييم مدى ملاءمتها بسرعة وتحديد ما إذا كانوا سيقروا المقالة كاملة. معظم أساتذة الجامعات يعانون من أن معظم المجالات العلمية المفهرسة في مستوعب سكوباس ترفض نشر أعمالهم. هذا بسبب فقدانها للبيانات التي تعتبر من المعايير الأساسية في نمط APA (الإصدار السابع). تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة مدى وعي أساتذة الجامعات بمحتوى المستخلص، وأكثر عناصر الملخصات المفقودة في مستخلصات الرسائل الجامعية العراقية، والعلاقة بين محتوى ملخصات رسائل الماجستير ووعي أساتذة الجامعات بمحتوى المستخلصات. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة تم وضع الأسئلة التالية:

- ١- إلى أي مدى يدرك أساتذة الجامعة العناصر التي يحتويها مستخلص الرسالة؟
- ٢- ما هي أكثر البيانات المفقودة في ملخص رسائل الماجستير؟
- ٣- هل توجد علاقة ارتباط بين محتوى ملخصات رسائل الماجستير ووعي اساتذة الجامعات بعناصر محتوى المستخلص؟

نتائج الدراسة مهمة لأساتذة الجامعات العراقية وطلاب الدراسات العليا والعلماء والباحثين لكتابة ملخص شامل وجيد التنظيم ومتناسك يعمل كمرآة للعمل العلمي. اتبعت الدراسة الحالية المنهج النوعي والكمي، لجمع البيانات النوعية تمت مقابلة عينة مكونة من ٦ أساتذة جامعيين تطوعوا للمشاركة في الدراسة عن طريق إجراء مقابلة شبه منظمة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، لجمع البيانات الكمية، تم اختيار عينة مكونة من ١٥ رسالة ماجستير بشكل عشوائي من ٥ جامعات. تم استخدام التكرارات والنسب المئوية ومصفوفة ارتباط بيرسون لتحليل البيانات. أظهرت النتائج أن ردود أساتذة الجامعة اتفقت على أكثر البنود شيوعاً التي يجب أن يحتويها الملخص، وهي المقدمة، والأهداف، والغرض، والأداة ، والنتائج. ولم يذكر أساتذة الجامعة أن الملخص يجب أن يحتوي على مشكلة الدراسة والمنهجية والاستنتاج. جميع المشاركين غير مدركين للمعايير التي يجب أن يتضمنها الملخص وفق معايير APA الطبعة السابعة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن معظم ملخصات رسائل الماجستير تفتقد إلى المنهجية والمشكلة/الفجوة والاستنتاج. وأظهرت النتائج وجود علاقة ارتباطية موجبة بين محتوى ملخصات رسائل الماجستير ووعي أساتذة الجامعات بعناصر المحتوى. يعود وعي أساتذة الجامعة إلى التداخل بين وظائف المستخلص. أيضاً ، ترجع البيانات المفقودة لرسائل الماجستير إلى تقليد الطلبة للرسائل السابقة وإدراك المشرف لمعايير الإصدار السابع لأسلوب APA. في ضوء النتائج، تم اقتراح بعض التوصيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الملخص، البحث الأكاديمي، وعي الأساتذة.

Background of the Study

Reviewing the Iraqi literature concerning the articles, researches, theses, and dissertations in methodology, the researcher found that the abstracts of

these works lack some important features, even the published Ph.D dissertations' abstracts missing some important elements (Note: such works should be perfect because they have been examined by a scientific committee members). To this end, this study is an attempt to tackle such problems from different angles.

Statement of the Problem

The abstract is important for both jury members and journal reviewers as it provides a brief and thorough summary of the research or article, helping them assess its relevance and potential impact quickly. Concerning the manuscript acceptance, the jury members and journal reviewers often have limited time because they receive a lot of submissions. The abstract helps them quickly determine if a paper is worth further consideration by providing a brief summary of the main objectives, methodology, results, and conclusions. This allows reviewers to efficiently assess if the paper meets the evaluation criteria or fits the scope of the journal. The abstract is important because it gives an initial impression of the research's quality and significance. Jury members and reviewers use the abstract to determine if the study contributes to existing knowledge or aligns with the journal's objectives. The effects of an imperfect abstract can vary depending on the context and purpose. It may result in an incomplete representation of the research, making it difficult for readers to understand the full scope and significance. This can lead to misunderstandings and potentially affect readers' perception of the research, resulting in reduced interest and missed opportunities for collaboration or dissemination. Additionally, abstracts with missing elements may not meet publication or conference requirements, limiting the visibility and exposure of the research. If crucial information is missing, it may also be challenging for search engines and indexing services to categorize and retrieve the research, reducing its visibility. Reviewing the literature to solve the abstract missing information and elements such as Koltay (2010); Wallwork (2011); Nicolussi and Mecatti (2013); Pawan (2019); Singh (2019); Mahrool (2020); and Wallwork (2021) investigated the significance of writing well organized abstract the merit and demit of writing abstracts, in addition to diagnostics the ill-abstract and providing solutions of such common norm among the scholars and researchers. The poor abstract is due to several factors that need to be investigated, this study is an attempt to investigate the university professors' awareness of writing abstract and the importance of the abstract in increasing the researcher's citations.

The Aims

This study aims to investigate the following:

- 1- University professors' awareness of the abstract content.
- 2- Most abstracts missing elements in Iraqi works.
- 3- The correlation between master thesis abstracts' content and university professors' awareness of the abstract content?

The Questions

To achieve the aims of the study, the following questions have been raised:

- 1- To what extend do the universities professors awareness of the abstract elements.
- 2- What are the most missing data in the abstract of the master's theses ?
- 3- Is there a correlation between master thesis abstracts' content and university professors' awareness of the abstract content?

The Significance

The outcomes of the study are significance for the Iraqi university instructors, postgraduate students, scholars, and researchers to write a comprehensive, well organized, and cohesive abstract that act as a mirror of the scientific work.

The Limits

This study is limited to:

- 1- Sample: the sample of the study is consisted from university professors and some master theses collected randomly from Iraqi universities.
- 2- Location: the study is conducted at the University of Anbar, University of Tikrit, University of Babylon, Al-Iraqia University, and University of Baghdad.
- 3- Duration: This study is conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2022-23.

Literature Review

The abstract contains three major features, the elements, the characteristics and the types. The elements are the introduction, the aim(s), the purpose(s), the question(s) or/and hypothesis, the sample, the tool(s), the methodology, the result(s), and the conclusion (APA 7th edition). While the characteristics of an abstract are briefness, conciseness, objectivity, and coherence and cohesion. The types, there are two major types of abstract: the descriptive and the informative (Arnaiz, 2021).

The abstract is a concise summary of the entire article, providing a brief overview of the background, purpose, methodology, results, and conclusions. The abstract is important because it is the first thing readers see and they may form an opinion about your research project based on your abstract. Once you have completed writing your research project, an executive summary will be written summarizing the content of your project (Singh, 2019). As such, it ought to offer a succinct synopsis of the complete work, incorporating your principal discoveries. Readers can rapidly ascertain the aim of the study and determine whether the paper is relevant to their interests by looking at the abstract. Bonsu (2021) identified the function of the abstract is to briefly summarize the various parts of the work. Although the abstract appears at the beginning of your paper, immediately after the title page, it should be the last thing you write once you determine the conclusion you want to draw.

In this sense, Aziz, et al. (2021); Pratiwi & Kurniawan (2021); and Wojciech, et al. (2018) found that the abstract of an empirical research report should describe (1) the research question (2) participants with specific characteristics, such as age, gender, and ethnicity (3) the basic characteristics of the research method (4) the basic results (5) conclusions and implications or application.

Kosasih (2018); Wallwork (2021); El-Dakhs (2018); Saidi & Khazaei (2021); and Jameel (2023), Jameel and Mahmood (2023), and Jameel and Ibrahim (2023) found that an abstract for a literature review or meta-analysis must describe (1) the problem or relationships studied (2) the study eligibility criteria (3) the type of participants (4)) the main findings, including the largest effect sizes and any significant characteristics. moderator conclusions about effect sizes (5), including limitations (6) implications for theory, policy, and practice. An abstract of a theoretically oriented article should describe (1) how the theory or model works and the principles that underlie it and (2) the phenomena that the theory or model reviews and its relationship with experimental results.

Previous Related Study

Jawad (2018) investigated how the abstracts of Master theses in linguistics are structured. There are two groups of papers, one with MA theses written by native English-speaking Americans and the other with MA theses written by Iraqi Arabs who are not native English speakers. After studying the data, we found that there were both similarities and differences in how often certain moves occur and their structure. The results of this study will help Iraqi writers who are not native English speakers. It provides important information about the steps in writing a thesis abstract in a way that is easy to understand.

Kosasih (2018) investigated the characteristics and variations in thesis abstracts at a State University in Banten. The aims are to give insights into the rhetorical moves and linguistic features employed in the abstracts under investigation. A sample consisted of 100 thesis abstracts by using a qualitative approach were gathered and analyzed. The outcomes revealed a consistent structure comprising background information, the objectives, the methodology, key findings, and implications. Additionally, rhetorical moves such as issues/gaps, literature reviews, and theoretical frameworks were identified as essential elements in most summaries.

Smith, et al. (2022) revealed the importance of thesis abstracts in the decision-making process of journal editors. The aim is to reveal whether the quality, clarity and completeness of a thesis abstract influence an editor's decision to accept or reject a submitted manuscript. The results show that the thesis abstract plays an important role in forming the first impression of an article and has a significant impact on the editor's decision. Manuscripts with well-written, concise, and informative abstracts are more likely to be accepted because they provide a clear overview of the research, its methods, and its key findings.

Methodology

The Sample

The participants are 6 university professors from University of Anbar, University of Tikrit, University of Babylon, Al-Iraqia University, University of Baghdad, and Almustansriah University. In addition, 15 master theses are selected randomly from 5 universities, the selected abstracts were published between 2021 to 2022. The data were analyzed using the APA style, 7th edition, this was used for data categorization and classification.

The Instrument

A semi-interview was conducted to elicit universities professors' awareness of the abstract elements. Also, gathering 15 master theses to analyze their abstracts' contents. The theses' abstracts analysis criteria are introduction, the problem, the aim(s), the purpose(s), the question(s) or/and hypothesis, the sample, the tool(s), the methodology, the result(s), and the conclusion.

The Results

Result Related to the First Question

To answer the first question, a semi-structure interview was conducted via Zoom application. Following are the transcription of the university professors' replies.

1st University Professor (Asst. Prof. Dr./ Male)

"I am very interested in the research abstract that I am presenting for the purpose of publishing it in a scientific journal which is indexed in Scopus. Therefore, I am interested in writing a good introduction related to the content of the research, as well as writing the objectives clearly. Then mention the research sample and results. I summarize the results in simple and short sentences.

2nd University Professor (Prof. Dr./ Female)

When I supervise a master's thesis, I take great care of the thesis abstract which is the master key of the study. I provide the postgraduate students with feedback regarding writing the study problem, the aims, the sample, the hypotheses, as well as the results. Many students write the results in detail, so I summarize the results in an academic manner and in the form of a narrative style without referring to statistical analysis.

3rd University Professor (Prof. Dr./ male)

When preparing a research for the purpose of publishing it in a scientific journal, I review the publishing conditions and abide by them in terms of font size, abstract, as well as the body of the research. A large number of journals require that the abstract contain the aims, the purpose, the sample, and the results. However, I also add the problem of the study, the research tool, and the conclusion.

4th University Professor (Prof. Dr./ Female)

The content of writing a research abstract, a master's thesis abstract, or a doctoral dissertation abstract is similar in terms of an introduction, aims, hypotheses, tools, the sample, the procedures, the statistical methods, the results, and recommendations.

5th University Professor (Asst. Prof. Dr./ Female)

When I evaluate an academic research, or write a research for the purpose of publishing in a scientific journal, I make sure that the abstract includes: introduction, objectives, the sample, the instrument, and the results.

6th University Professor (Prof. Dr./ male)

It is important that an abstract should contain: an introduction, the aims, the questions, a sample, an instrument, and the results.

The universities professors' replies are agreed on the most common items that an abstract should contain, which are the introduction, the aims, the purpose, the instrument, and the results. The universities professors did not mention that an abstract should contains a problem of a study, the methodology, and the conclusion. All the participants are unaware of the all criteria that an abstract should include.

Result Related to the Second Question

To answer the second question " What are the most missing data in the abstract of the master's theses?. The APA 7th edition criteria were used to analyze the data, table 1 shows the results.

Table 1: Data of Master theses Abstracts

Data	Frequency 15	Percentage %
introduction.	12	80%
Problem/ gap.	5	33.33
Aim.	15	100%
Problem.	5	33.33
Purpose.	11	73.33
Question /Hypothesis.	9	60%
Sample.	13	86.66%
Tool.	8	53.33%
Methodology.	6	40%
Result.	14	93.33%
Conclusion.	3	20%

Table 1 shows that the most missing data are the methodology (40%), the problem (33.33), and the conclusion (20%). While, the most exist data are the introduction (80%), the aim (100%), the purpose (73.33), the question (60%), the sample (86.66%), and the result (93.33).

Results of the Third Question

To answer the third question "Is there a correlation between master thesis abstracts' content and university professors' awareness of the abstract content? Pearson's r and p-value were used to reveal the type of the correlation (positive or negative), table 2 shows the results.

Correlation Matrix			
Questionnaire		Test Marks	
Universities' Awareness	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
	N	—	
Abstracts' Contents	Pearson's r	0.582	—
	df	17	—
	p-value	0.009	—
	N	19	—

Table 2 shows a positive correlation between the master thesis abstracts' content and university professors' awareness of the abstract content, with a Pearson's r = 0.582 and a p-value of 0.009.

Discussion of the Results

The results of the first question revealed that most of the universities professors were unaware of inclusion the problem of the study, the methodology, and the conclusion in the abstract. This is due to the mix and overlap between the nature and the function of the introduction and the problem of the study, also it is clear that there is a mix and intervention between the role and the function of the methodology. Most of the abstracts include the "participants" and the tool/ instrument as component of the methodology, and neglect the others contents such as the population, the procedures, the data analyses, the validity and the reliability, the method of sample selection, the nature of the sample, the design of the study, and the methods of statistical analysis (most of the abstracts include the following statement "A SPSS package was used to analyze the data"). The missing of such data in abstract may due to write a brief text within 250 to 300 words only. The university professors need to develop their ability in summarizing technique, summarizing is a scientific knowledge that includes strategies, techniques, and tools. To write

a summary of an academic work it needs a professional writer. Abstract is a summary of a work, and it cannot be done just by writing the most important data, writing an abstract is a craft that needs practice and knowledge.

Concerning the results of the second question, the theses' abstracts miss many data such as the problem/ gap of the study, which the students made overlap with the background and the introduction sections. This confusion lead to miss or neglect to write a problem and show the gap of the study. The section related to the gap or the problem of the study must be written in clear and precise way at the beginning of the abstract. In addition, writing poor methodology may due to the fact that the students think to write information related to the sample and the instrument is sufficient to present the methodology of the study. also, the results revealed that only 20% of the abstract included a conclusion, the students believe that the result section is similar to the conclusion section, this fact is due to the poor written of the conclusion in the body of the theses. The students made overlap between the information that the findings/ results present and the information that the conclusions provide the reader and the interests with.

The results of the third question revealed that there is a positive correlation between the universities professors' awareness of the content of an abstract and the content of the 15 abstracts under investigation. The universities professors were un aware of including the problem/ gap of the study, the methodology, and the conclusion. These data were also missing in the 15 abstracts under investigation. It seems that the master students imitate pervious theses in writing the abstract of their theses, in addition the missing of such data in a student's thesis abstract was proved to be due to the supervisor's unawareness of including such data in the body of the abstract.

Conclusion

The study revealed that the universities' professors made an overlap between the function of the introduction, the background of the study, and the problem or the gap of the study, in addition there was an overlap between the function of the results and the conclusions, and most master theses' abstracts wrote a very poor conclusion. The study prove that the missing of some data in the theses abstracts is due in the first rank to the universities' professors awareness of the content of the abstract based on the APA 7th edition criteria.

Recommendations

It is very important to hold a scientific professional development sessions to develop universities' professors efficacies and practical competence. In

addition, it is important for the examination committee member and the scientific jury member to focus on the content of the abstract and write a report that must be compulsory to be fulfilled.

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