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INTO THE CHALLENGES OF ALIGNING KEY SECTIONS OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS: COGNITIVE ANALYSIS, PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS, AND INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	The purpose of this study is to introduce an instrument that contains a set of exercises intended to help doctoral students align the key sections of their dissertation document. The exercises are developed after providing cognitive analysis of the factors that make aligning these key sections challenging to many, and after discussing pedagogical tools that can be used to address these challenges.
Background	Writing doctoral dissertations is a formidable endeavor for numerous students. Among the myriad challenges that are faced is the issue of aligning key sections of the dissertation document. Students often struggle with conceptualizing the alignment among different sections of the various chapters of their dissertation. In this study, we introduce here an instrument that includes a set of exercises to help address the challenges of alignment in chapter one, before the issues spiral and addressing them becomes complicated.
Completion of Methodology	This paper reviews literature that discusses the underlying challenges that face the writing of doctoral dissertations in general and the alignment of the key sections in particular. It analyzes the cognitive factors that contribute to the challenges and examines the pedagogical tools that can be used to address these challenges. The review of the literature, the analysis of the cognitive, and the

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examination of pedagogical tools lead to the introduction of an instrument that is designed to help address the challenges of aligning the key sections of doctoral dissertations.

Contribution	This paper presents an instrument with a set of exercises that are intended to help students align key sections of their doctoral dissertation document. This alignment step is crucial to the successful completion of dissertation documents and is best tackled early in the writing. Delaying alignment or worse, ignoring alignment altogether, can complicate the issue and lead to numerous extra steps and delays. Our developed instrument here can be used to tackle this issue of alignment from the beginning and throughout the writing and completion status of dissertation documents.
Findings	Students are often faced with challenges when aligning the key sections of a doctoral dissertation. They struggle with conceptualizing the alignment process. They often write each section separately, and independently of other sections of a chapter and a dissertation. However, sections of the dissertation document are interrelated, and each section affects the writing of other sections. For the successful completion of the dissertation, the sections need to be aligned, and it would be best if these issues are tackled from the beginning of the writing and throughout the writing of the dissertation.
Recommendations for Practitioners	A methodological approach to aligning the sections of a doctoral dissertation is crucial for the resulting treatise to be coherent and present a unified purpose that threads through each chapter consistently.
Recommendations for Researchers	We recommend that doctoral students follow the exercises we introduced in the instrument provided in this paper or take other similar approaches. Without such an approach, aligning the key sections of a doctoral dissertation will be challenging, the dissertation writing process will be more complicated, and the time necessary to complete it will lengthen.
Impact on Society	The findings of this research will help doctoral mentors/advisors as they guide students in aligning key sections of their doctoral dissertations.
Keywords	doctoral dissertation alignment, aligning sections of a doctoral dissertation, doctoral dissertation challenges

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