# Research Paper Title

A one liner

# Executive Overview

Complete this as an executive summary only after the completion of the study.

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CHAPTER 1

# SCOPE and NATURE OF THE STUDY

## Introduction

Provide an introduction to the study. A general narrative to what you intend to investigate, research or study.

## Context of the Study

The background/context section of chapter 1 introduces the reader to the contextual issues relating to a field of learning. It is often referred to as the ‘rationale’ in the literature, e.g. it should ‘provide the background to your problem, based on your literature review, [and] the meaning of your research for theory-building’ (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2009: 46). This section should thus show how the researcher developed an interest in the study. It could draw on some literature, statistics, quotes, etc. which will be the start of the ‘golden thread’ that should run throughout the dissertation/thesis. It should thus link with the next section, and with the rest of the introduction and overview of the study.

## Ontology

Ontology refers to what the researcher considers to be reality, and how he/she understands the world. The best way to explain ontology is that it is a description of the researchers world view. Is he/she a realist; does he/she believe in (external) absolute truths? Alternatively, is he/she sensitive to how context and personal views influence his/her (and other’s) world view?

In this section, the researcher should place him/herself within the study. It often entails personal experiences and influences that are likely to impact on how the study is conducted. For example, a personal story which affected the interest in the research topic, could be related. The ontology prepares the reader for the problem statement – see below.

## Research Problem

The research problem should flow from the background/context and the ontology. It should be possible to see how the first two sections prepared the reader for the problem statement. Given this preparation, what problem is it that the study will attempt to address? For example, ‘the problem that this study intends to address is the apparent misalignment between policy and practice in the workplace’.

### Hypothesis and Zero Hypothesis

If you do a quantitative study.

### Problem Statement

If you do a qualitative study.

## Aims and Objectives

The aim of the study should address the ‘aspiration’ of the study, i.e. what it is that the study hopes to achieve. For example, ‘the aim of this study is to develop a framework/construct a change management strategy/test a hypothesis/explain the mismatch (etc.) in respect of the problem (see above).

The aim should therefore identify the main purpose of the study. The aim/purpose of the study is often translated into the title of the study

The objectives of the study deconstruct the aim. Thus, the researcher could say: ‘to give effect to the aim of the study, the following objectives are envisaged’:

Objective 1

Objective 2

Objective 3, etc.

## Research Questions (Primary) and Secondary Research Questions

The research question should reflect the aim/purpose of the study. The following criteria are useful when developing research questions (Vithal & Jansen, 2004 in Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2009: 7):

* They should link directly to the aim/purpose of the study;
* They should connect logically to one another, ‘the second research question can be answered only once the first question has been answered, etc.’ (p. 7);
* They should ‘link conceptually through key terms that appear in each question’; and

They should be ‘self-explanatory and apparent to outside readers, and are able to stand alone as researchable questions’.

As in the case of the aim/purpose of the study, where the objectives unpack the aim, the secondary (sub-questions) should deconstruct the primary research question (two to four sub-questions are sufficient).

In qualitative studies, you will always have secondary research questions. However, in quantitative studies, the objectives could be translated into hypotheses or ‘educated, informed guesses’ (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001 in Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2009: 7).

## Epistemology

Epistemology relates to the theoretical lens that the researchers chooses to view the problem that he/she intends to address. Epistemology is often referred to as ‘the philosophy’ or ‘the paradigm’ of the study. It should clearly link to the ontology, the problem, the aim and objectives and the nature of the research questions. There are many different epistemologies to choose from, but the main ‘types’ are positivism (an objective lens, quantitative), or interpretative (a subjective lens, qualitative) (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2009: 20).

## Theoretical Framework or Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework is the body of knowledge within which the study is placed. The purpose of the theoretical framework is to evaluate what is already known about the topic (phenomenon). In chapter 1 (Introduction and Overview of the Study), a short summary of the key theories to be used, authoritative scholars to be consulted and key models to be followed, will be provided. The theoretical framework is expanded on in chapter 2: The Literature Review. Most studies will strongly draw on a particular theoretical framework, e.g. management studies.

Some studies call for a conceptual framework. A conceptual framework is usually derived from the theoretical framework (literature), but will be used to guide the study. It may entail a current (or adjusted) model, a structure or an approach chosen to direct the design and data collection of the study. Below is a table outlining the key differences between a theoretical and conceptual framework:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Theoretical framework (literature)** | **Conceptual framework** |
| Authoritative theories | Researcher’s own position |
| Authoritative scholars | Adoption (or adaptation) of a model |
| Important concepts discussed | The relationships between concepts |
| The theories to be utilised | Provides direction for the study |
| Found in scholarly literature | Derived from literature and/or practice |
| **Purpose of theoretical and conceptual frameworks** | |
| Placing the study within the body of knowledge, identifying the gaps | Could result in a model/idea/concept emerging from the study |

## Theory Development

Theory development refers to how new theories/concepts are advanced or improved. The two main forms of theory development is ‘inductive’ (qualitative: in which case the researcher will ask research questions), or ‘deductive’ (quantitative: in which case the researcher will develop hypotheses).

## Design and Method

“The mode of inquiry informs the research design” (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2009: 21) and is in turn directly influenced by the ontology, the problem, the aim and objectives and the nature of the research questions. The design reflects the overall plan to undertake the study. There are many designs, but the three main forms of inquiry are qualitative, quantitative or multi-method designs (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2009: 21). Design refers to the blueprint (overall plan) and the steps and procedures to undertake the study (methodology/methods).

### Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals represent the larger group from which they were selected (e.g. a subset of a population that is used to represent the entire group as a whole). The sampling process of selecting units (e.g., people, organisations) from a population of interest allows the researcher during studying the sample to generalise the research results back to the population from which the sample was chosen.

There are different types of sampling, such as probability and non-probability sampling, e.g.: the following sampling methods are examples of probability sampling:

* Simple Random Sampling (SRS)
* Stratified Sampling.
* Cluster Sampling.
* Systematic Sampling.
* Multistage Sampling (in which some of the methods above are combined in stages)

The following sampling methods are examples of non-probability sampling:

* Volunteer sampling
* Convenient sampling
* Purposive sampling
* Quota sampling (proportional and non-proportional)
* Snowball sampling
* Matched sampling
* Genealogy based sampling

The researcher has to indicate what type of sampling process (or combination thereof) will be deployed in the research. This explanation is just an overview of what will be discussed in detail later sections (normally chapter three).

### Data Collection

The researcher describes how data will be gathered. This explanation is just an overview of what will be discussed in detail later sections (normally chapter three).

There are two types of data sources, primary and secondary data (Cooper and Schindler, 1998: 256). A few examples of data collection methods are as follows: e-mail, questionnaires, telephone, face-to-face or action groups. The researcher has to identify and motivate the data collection method (or combination thereof) that will be used in the research. The researcher has to describe all the properties of the chosen data collection method (or combination thereof), e.g.: the versatility of the data, the quantity of data, the sample control, the quality of data, the response rate, speed and cost.

### Data Analysis

The methods and tools used to analyse data are dependent on the type of study the researcher chooses, e.g.: a qualitative, quantitative mixed method, or triangulated study.

Kreuger and Neuman (2006:434) offer a useful outline of the differences and similarities between qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis. According to them, qualitative and quantitative analyses have similarities in data analysis that involve aspects as follows:

* Inference, which is the use of reasoning to reach a conclusion based on evidence;
* A public method or process for the illuminating of the researcher study design;
* A comparison as a central process such as the identification of patterns or aspects that are similar or different; and
* Striving to avoid errors, false conclusions and misleading interpretations.

The obvious dissimilarities between qualitative and quantitative data analysis are described briefly as follows:

* Qualitative data analysis is less standardised with a wide variety in approaches, while quantitative researchers choose from a specialised, standard set of data analysis techniques;
* The results of qualitative data analysis guide subsequent data collection, and analysis is less-distinct up until the final stage of the research process, whereas quantitative analysis, data analysis does not begin until all data has been collected and consolidated into numbers;
* Qualitative researchers create new concepts and theory by blending together empirical and abstract concepts, while quantitative researchers manipulate numbers in order to test a hypothesis with variable constructs; and
* Qualitative data analysis is in the form of words, which are relatively imprecise, diffuse and context based, whereas quantitative researchers use the language of statistical relationships and correlations in analysis.

This explanation is just an overview of what will be discussed in detail later sections (normally chapter three).

## Scope and Limitations

The limitations (or in some instances the delimitations, or delineations) of the study define the scope of the study. The researcher describes aspects that may be assumed, or even eliminated from the research.

## Chapter Overview

The researcher provides an overview of the chapters in the research study.

You may decide to name the chapters, as follows:

* Chapter One: Scope and Nature of the Study, (Included in Chapter One in this order: Introduction, Context, Ontology, Problem, Aims/objectives, Research questions, Epistemology, Theory development, Design and methodology, Chapter Layout, Conclusion),
* Chapter Two: Theoretical Foundation and Literature Review,
* Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology,
* Chapter Four: Research Analysis and Findings,
* Chapter Five: Recommendations and Conclusion.

Keep in mind that each of the chapters are “mini” papers in itself within the context of your larger research and should be knitted together with an introduction and conclusion for each chapter.

## Conclusion

CHAPTER 2

# THEORETICAL FOUNDATION and LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

Research is founded in theory and for that purpose a review of existing literature is required.

The literature review is a review of the existing body of knowledge on the topic you are researching.  You will investigate options described in the body of knowledge based on the research problem, aim and objectives of the research and pose arguments that will oppose, underpin, or support the research questions.

## Theme 1

## Theme 2

## Theme 3

## Conclusion

CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH DESIGN and METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

## Research Design

## Research Methodology

### Sample

### Data collection

### Data analysis

### Ethics

## Conclusion

CHAPTER 4

# DATA PRESENTATION and ANALYSIS

## Introduction

## Presentation & Finding #1

## Presentation & Finding #2

## Key Findings

## Conclusion

CHAPTER 5

# RECOMMENDATIONS and ACTION PLANS

## Introduction

## Recommendation & Plan #1

## Recommendation & Plan #2

## Recommendation for Further Research

## Conclusion

# CONCLUSION

# LEARNING EXPERIENCE

# REFERENCES

Maree, K. and Van der Westhuizen, C. 2009. Head Start in Designing Research Proposals in the Social Sciences. Juta & Company Ltd. Cape Town, South Africa.

# ANNEXURE