Writing the Theoretical Framework Chapter

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Thesis Structure
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Theoretical Framework
- Methodology
- Results
- Analysis
- Conclusion
- References

UKZN Marking Criteria
4. Central Theoretical Assumptions
   - Is the candidate’s conceptual understanding of the approach to the topic and the topic itself adequate?
   - Is the argument for the theoretical approach adopted here convincing?

Key Elements of a Research Question
- What?
  - Object of analysis
- Why?
  - Theoretical paradigm
- How?
  - Research Method

Writing your research question
- What are you going to research?
  - Can you clearly define your object of analysis?
- Why is this topic of interest?
  - Does it relate to a specific theoretical paradigm?
  - What are the broader implications of your topic?
- How are you going to conduct your research?
  - What approach will you take or which method will you employ?

Theoretical Paradigm
- ‘Theories are tools to help us think’ (Stokes, 2007: 64)
- ‘we need to find a theoretical paradigm which will be useful and help us to investigate our chosen object of analysis’ (Stokes, 2007: 64)
- Defining a theoretical paradigm:
  - Think about why you are interested in your object of analysis
  - Provides a rationale for your research
Theoretical Frameworks: 2 Dimensions

1. Influences how you define and clarify your research topic

2. Influences how you choose your methodological approach and methods of data collection

(Stratton and Lesham, 2008)

Theoretical Perspective 1.

- Making explicit the gap in the literature to which your research is directed
- Delimiting your research by stating what is included and excluded from your investigation with theoretically justified reasons for your choices
- Developing conceptual positions (paradigms) as frameworks in which to design your research

(Stafford and Lesham, 2008)

Theoretical Perspectives 2.

- Creating your conceptual framework(s) that determine how your research is designed, analysed, and then concluded
- Giving theoretical authority to the decisions that you have to make throughout the duration of your research process
- Justifying the conceptualisations of your conclusions as contributing to knowledge within the specific parameters of a stated gap in knowledge

(Stafford and Lesham, 2008)

Reviewing the Literature

- Has the conceptual or theoretical base for the study been clearly described and are they related to the research problem?
- Is there a theory underlying a research question?
- Is there a clear and explicit connection between the theory, earlier findings and purpose of the present study?

(Berger and Patchner, 1988: 156-159)

Examples of Theoretical Paradigms

- Queer Theory
- Feminist Theory
- Postmodernism
- Postcolonialism
- Political Economy
- Genre Theory
- Audience Theory
- Social Communication
What is a theoretical framework?

- It is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research project.
- It introduces and describes the theory that explains why the research problem exists.
- It consists of concepts and, together with their definitions and reference to relevant scholarly literature, existing theory that is used for your research project.

Why use a Theoretical Framework?

- Using a theoretical framework for your thesis can help open up your analysis by providing a particular set of questions to ask, and a particular perspective to use when examining your topic.

How to use a Theoretical Framework?

- You need to be explicit about:
  - what the theoretical framework is
  - who is credited with coming up with the original theory
  - any changes you are making to the theory in your use of it

- Your thesis needs to make explicit connections between:
  - Literature Review
  - Theoretical Framework
  - Research Methodology
  - Analysis

- It must frame, or inform, every aspect of your thesis.

Writing a Theoretical Framework

- Clearly describe the framework, concepts, models, or specific theories
- Position your theoretical framework within a broader context of related frameworks, concepts, models, or theories
- Use the present tense
- Make your theoretical assumptions explicit
- Be aware of the limitations of your theoretical framework

What does a theoretical framework do?

- It enables the reader to evaluate the thesis critically
- It connects you to existing knowledge / academic literature
- It provides you with a choice of appropriate research methods
- It forces you to address questions of why? and how?
  - Description / Analysis / Generalisation
- It helps you identify the limits of those generalisations
Key Elements of a Research Question

What?
Object of analysis

Why?
Theoretical paradigm

How?
Research Method

Planning your research

1. Research Question
2. Aims and Objectives
3. Object of Analysis
4. Research Method(s)
5. Theoretical Paradigm
6. Literature Review
7. Timetable
8. Bibliography

What is your theoretical framework?

Â What is it about your chosen subject that you find interesting?
Â What theoretical approaches can you bring to bear on your investigation?
Â How have previous scholars justified their research in the area?
Â What theoretical approaches have been taken to your topic?
Â How have previous researchers explained why they are interested in the subject?

References

