

**Isaac Boaheng (PhD)**

**A Guide to Academic  
Research and Writing in  
Theology and  
Religious Studies**



**Foreword by: Rev. Prof. Yaw Adu-Gyamfi**

**Introduction by: Rev. Prof. Fred Mawusi Amevenku**

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ISAAC BOAHENG  
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## **DEDICATION**

To my mother, Mad. Mary Ampomah and  
father (posthumously), Mr. Noah Nti.

To my wife, Mrs. Gloria Boaheng and children,  
Christian, Benedict, Julia, Kalix and Myjiloy.

To my siblings.

All my students across the globe.



## SCHOLARLY ENDORSEMENTS

*A Guide to Academic Research and Writing in Theology and Religious Studies* is an outstanding contribution to the field of research methods which gives a comprehensive and accessible guide to the research process. In this book, Dr Boaheng demonstrated academic prowess and explored the complexities of research design, methodology, and analysis in a simplified way. The strength of the book lies in the ability of the author to balance theoretical rigour with practical applicability, making it an indispensable resource for researchers in the field of theology and religious studies.

Dr Boaheng showcases an in-depth commitment to ethical and responsible research practices which provides a vital framework for scholars to engage in research that is both innovative and impactful. I wholeheartedly highly recommend this book to all scholars in the field of religion both in Universities and Seminaries.

***Rev. Dr John Ayo Oladapo***

*Executive Director,*

*Institute of Family Life and Societal Development/Centre for Blissful Home Initiative, Nigeria*

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This revolutionary book is a gift to researchers of theology and religion in the Global South. In light of growing interdisciplinary approaches to research, this comprehensive masterpiece details methods for theological and religious research from history to contemporary times. It is crafted in a way that allows readers of all levels to interact with it and perform tasks to evaluate their understanding of the methods. I highly recommend this book to anyone serious about research.

***Carine Amo-Nyampong***

*Independent Researcher, Ghana*

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Dr Isaac Boaheng's *A Guide to Academic Research and Writing in Theology and Religious Studies* provides, in a thoughtfully structured manner, a comprehensive and accessibly written resource for students and teachers in academic research in theology and religious studies. It holds considerable potential to serve as a key reference material within academic libraries and curricula dedicated to religious and theological scholarship in Africa. I can imagine that many students will find it a reliable guide in navigating the complex terrain of theological and religious research. Dr Boaheng, with this book, makes an invaluable contribution to efforts at building an African cadre of pre-eminent researchers in religious and theological studies.

***Rev. Dr Michael F. Wandusim***  
*Postdoctoral Research Associate,*  
*Centre for Religion and Modernity,*  
*University of Münster, Germany*

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This book by Dr Isaac Boaheng, arguably, constitutes a ground-breaking academic endeavour in Africa. Difficulties in sourcing rich resource materials for literature-based research, non-existence of books on research methods used in biblical and theological research in the African context and inconsistent expectations from supervisors and examiners regarding appropriate research approaches, presentation of reports and techniques for analysis of data, are the common snags that students pursuing biblical and theological studies face in Africa. As a lecturer in the field of theological research and as an experienced researcher with over a hundred publications, Boaheng's book, which is a research manual, is not only timely but also comes in handy.

In this book, a reader is presented with the general knowledge about research. Research Proposal, which is one of the teething problems for up-and-coming researchers, is clearly explained in this book. Basic understanding of Research Methodology (Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed and Triangulation) methods, data collection, and

sampling techniques research report presentation has been presented with cleverness. The book also covers the issue of research supervision. In addition, Boaheng offers a step-by-step tutorial on how to undertake a critical review of published books and articles, both as an assignment and as part of a literature review section of a thesis.

I have no hesitation recommending this book for scholars, lecturers and students who are interested in embarking on research in any form in Africa or teaching others to do research.

***Very Rev. Dr Emmanuel Twumasi-Ankrah***

*Lecturer in Old Testament Studies,*

*Christian Service University*

*The Executive Director,*

*Synagogé Institute of Biblical Languages*

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*A Guide to Academic Research and Writing in Theology and Religious Studies* stands as an exemplary resource, offering an invaluable toolkit for scholars navigating the intricate world of research methods in the realm of theology and religious studies. It is a must-read for anyone looking for in-depth knowledge in academic research and writing in Theology and religious studies.

***Very Rev. Dr. Joseph Owusu Atuahene***

*Ordained Minister*

*Methodist Church Ghana*

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Many African students of theology struggle with research work due to a lack of well-researched academic materials that provide salient details for conducting academic research in the African context. This guide book is an excellent gap-bridger that provides thorough information for the conduct of theological research with profound and exceptionally faultless accuracy. In simple language, with meticulous attention to details and the common challenges that research students grapple with

in mind, the author gives practical guidelines for conducting research. I recommend this masterpiece to all lecturers and students of theology and religious studies across the globe.

***Rev. Dr Solomon Nortey***  
*Ordained Minister,*  
*Methodist Church Ghana*

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This book is a comprehensive and invaluable guide for anyone involved in academic research and thesis writing. It covers all essential aspects, from the fundamentals of research and proposal writing to empirical research approaches and ethical considerations. The book provides invaluable tips on quality assurance and how to deal with common challenges in research. The part on research supervision is valuable to both supervisors and researchers. Each chapter is meticulously structured with practical guidelines and review exercises to reinforce learning. This makes it an indispensable tool for both novice and experienced researchers. I have no hesitation in recommending this book for scholars, lecturers, and students who are interested in embarking on research in any form or teaching others to do research.

***Rev. Samuel Boahen***  
*Minister, Methodist Church Ghana*  
*PhD Student, All Nations University, Ghana*

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## FOREWORD

In this illuminating book, Rev. Dr Isaac Boaheng beckons readers into a realm where the art of academic research and writing meets the profound disciplines of theology and religious studies. With meticulous care and scholarly precision, Dr Boaheng unveils a comprehensive foundation tailored specifically to the unique demands of these fields.

The journey begins in chapter one, where the fundamental concept of research is illuminated, underscoring its pivotal role in problem-solving and the advancement of knowledge. Chapter two focuses on the research proposal, detailing its components and importance in guiding the research process. In chapter three, various empirical research approaches are explored, alongside sampling techniques and data interpretation. Chapter four delves into the ethical considerations of research, including informed consent and plagiarism avoidance. Chapter five offers guidelines for conducting critical reviews of scholarly materials, aiding readers in evaluating existing literature. Chapter six provides an overview of the thesis/dissertation writing process, guiding readers through the writing journey with practical examples. Finally, chapter seven emphasises quality assurance in thesis writing, covering topics such as transitions, paraphrasing, proper citation, research supervision, dealing with sweeping statements and other related issues.

At the conclusion of each chapter, readers are met with thought-provoking review questions designed to reinforce the principles and insights gleaned from the text. Through this meticulously crafted journey, the book equips readers with the essential tools and knowledge needed to embark on their own scholarly endeavours in theology and religious studies

Without a doubt, this book will make a significant and positive impact on the realm of academic research and writing within the disciplines of theology and religious studies. I consider it an essential reading for both scholars and educators, particularly those engaged in teaching and studying the Bible at universities and seminaries. This book stands as an indispensable resource that promises to enrich and

elevate the standards of academic discourse in theology and religious studies.

***Rev. Prof. Yaw Adu-Gyamfi***

*Dean of Faculty of Humanities,*

*Christian Service University, Kumasi, Ghana;*

*Research Fellow,*

*University of the Western Cape, South Africa.*



## PREFACE

My nearly ten-year journey of researching and publishing, along with teaching Research Methodology and examining postgraduate research projects across various institutions in Africa, has highlighted the urgent need for a comprehensive research and writing guide tailored to theology and religious studies students. This recognition arises from a clear gap in current literature that fails to adequately address the unique challenges these students encounter in their research endeavours. The impetus for writing this book was further solidified by a recent invitation to teach a research methodology course at an East African institution.

The lecture notes I prepared for the course yielded two manuscripts which were subsequently published as *A Guide to Academic Research and Writing in Theology and Religious Studies* and *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies*. The purpose of these volumes is to bridge the existing gap and equip students with the skills needed for effective research. Students are advised to read both volumes together, even though each book can be studied independently of the other.

The present volume, *A Guide to Academic Research and Writing in Theology*, consists of seven chapters. Chapter one discusses research essentials like problem-solving and knowledge contribution. Chapter two emphasises the importance of the research proposal and its components. The third chapter explores methodological approaches to conducting empirical research. Selected quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches are considered. Chapter four addresses ethics, including ethical conduct, informed consent, and plagiarism. The fifth chapter provides guidelines for critical reviews. Chapter six outlines the thesis/dissertation writing process, while chapter seven focuses on quality assurance in thesis writing, covering transitions, paraphrasing, research supervision, dealing with sweeping statements, proofreading, and other issues.

The book is written in a non-technical style to ensure accessibility for all readers. Each chapter is organised thematically with sub-headings and ends with a summary of key points and review

questions to facilitate reflection and comprehension before progressing to the next chapter. There are review exercises at the end of each chapter to challenge the reader and to further solidify understanding and application. There are also over 400 suggested research topics at the end of the book.

Whilst this book is written with African students in mind, its value extends to students globally. Universities and seminaries will find this book beneficial for both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. I hope that it will empower researchers to navigate the complex terrain of theological and religious studies with insight, sensitivity, and rigour.

***Isaac Boaheng, PhD***

*Senior Lecturer in Theology and Ethics*

*Department of Theology,*

*Christian Service University, Ghana;*

*Research Fellow,*

*Department of Biblical and Religious Studies*

*University of the Free State, South Africa*

*June 2024.*

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I am first of all thankful to the Almighty God for making this project a reality. With God all things are possible. I am a living testimony to this assertion.

I am immensely thankful to my academic mentors and advisors, whose guidance, wisdom, and encouragement have been invaluable throughout this journey. You have played diverse roles in shaping my academic career. In this regard, I owe a huge gratitude to Prof. Sam Afrane (President, Christian Service University, Ghana), Very Rev. Prof. John D.K. Ekem (Immediate Past Vice President, Methodist University, Ghana) and Dr Samuel B. Adubofour (Dean of Graduate Studies, Christian Service University, Ghana) for their mentorship. I am extremely grateful to Rev. Prof. Yaw Adu-Gyamfi, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities (Christian Service University) for writing the foreword to this publication after reviewing the manuscript. Rev. Prof. Fred Mawusi Amevenku (Trinity Theological Seminary, Ghana) needs special appreciation for his mentorship and for graciously writing an introduction to this volume.

As noted in the preface there are two books in this series—*A Guide to Academic Research and Writing in Theology and Religious Studies* and *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies*. I express much gratitude to Rev. Prof. Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana), Prof. Kojo Okyere (University of Cape Coast, Ghana), Apostle Dr Christian Tsekpoe (Pentecost University, Ghana), Rev. Dr Kwaku Boamah (University of Ghana), Rev. Dr Daniel Nii Aboagye-Aryeh (Perez University College, Ghana), Rev. Dr Jacob Mokhutso (University of the Free State, South Africa), Rev. Dr John Ayo Oladapo (President, Institute of Family Life and Societal Development, Nigeria), Rev. Dr Michael F. Wandusim (Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Münster, Germany), Very Rev. Dr Joseph Atuahene (Ordained Minister, Methodist Church Ghana), Very Rev. Dr Emmanuel Twumasi Ankrah (Christian Service University), Rev. Dr Solomon Nortey (Ordained Minister, Methodist

Church Ghana), Rev. Samuel Boahen (Minister, Methodist Church Ghana and PhD Student, All Nations University, Ghana) and Rev. Carine Amo-Nyampong (Independent Researcher, Ghana) for their support in writing these volumes. These scholars (generally) read the manuscripts, offered useful suggestions and endorsed one of these books.

I also express a profound gratitude to Dr Kevin Smith, the Principal of South African Theological Seminary (SATS). My interactions with Kevin and his publications inspired me a lot as I wrote this book. I also thank Dr Eskinder Tadesse (Director, African Institute for International Studies [AIIS], Addis Ababa, Ethiopia). Drs. Cornelia van Deventer (Academic Dean—SATS), Caswell Ntseno (Vice Principal, Operations—SATS), Jesse F. Kipimo (Head of Program Delivery Team-SATS), and Robert Falconer (Coordinator for masters and doctoral research—SATS) are also appreciated for ways in which they contributed directly and/or indirectly to the publication of the two volumes.

I also thank Reverends Ebenezer Asibu-Dadzie Jnr, Paul Asante-Bonah, Kwadwo Antwi, Isaac Nyanful, Isaac Oduro-Boateng, Evelyn Ayisi Mensah, Benjamin Arthur and Jonathan Amankwaa Oppong (all ordained ministers of the Methodist Church Ghana) and Emmanuel Misiame for their encouragement.

I also thank my family for their unwavering support, understanding, and patience during the writing process. Your love and encouragement sustained me through the challenges and triumphs of this endeavour. My wife Gloria Boaheng and our five children are appreciated in a special way. I owe profound gratitude to my parents, Mad. Mary Ampomah and the late Mr. Noah Nti, for their care, love and support. I pray that my mother will enjoy the fruit of her labour. May God richly bless my siblings, Yaw Boahen, Kofi Boachie, Samuel Boahen (Rev.), Hayford Kyeremeh Ampaabeng, Collins Frimpong, and Solomon Amoh for their encouragement and support. I salute you all!

I further express my gratitude to all lecturers in the Department of Theology (Christian Service University) especially Rev. Baffour Awuah, Pastor Paul Kang-Ewala Diboro, Pastor Joseph Gyanvi-Blay,

and Pastor Charles Agyemang. Mr. David Kwao-Sarbah is appreciated for his kind words of encouragement to me. Finally, my gratitude goes to the publisher, editors, and reviewers who worked tirelessly to ensure that the book got to this standard.

***Soli Deo Gloria!* — To God alone be the glory!**



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## INTRODUCTION

Embarking on the journey of academic research and writing, especially in the fields of theology and religious studies, can be both an exhilarating and a daunting task. The landscape of research is vast and often complex, demanding a clear understanding of methodology, ethical considerations and effective communication. It is in this context that Rev. Dr Isaac Boaheng's *A Guide to Academic Research and Writing in Theology and Religious Studies* emerges as an essential resource. This book meticulously maps out the terrain of academic research to assist researchers in navigating their scholarly pursuits.

The book is organised into seven chapters. Each chapter ends with a set of review questions intended to help the reader practice and implement the ideas learnt in the chapter. The book opens in chapter one with a discussion of the meaning of research, identifying some characteristics of good research, including its ability to solve a problem and contribute to knowledge. To do this, the research must be specific, objective, systematic, accurate and precise. Research-based human decisions are usually the basis of progress and advancement, making research exceedingly important to human existence and quality life.

Chapter two outlines the importance of the research proposal as the plan that guides the researcher to solve the problem identified. In other words, the research proposal identifies the *what* (problem) and the *how* (plan) that dictate how the research process will unfold. The chapter further examines the main components of the research proposal, including the title of the research, the statement of the problem, the review of relevant literature and the method for the study. Since the requirement for institutional research usually varies, the reader is encouraged to consult and follow the specific guidelines of their institution to complete the proposal.

In chapter three, Dr Boaheng identifies and discusses major methodological approaches in empirical research, including quantitative and qualitative methodologies, mixed-method approaches and triangulation. The circumstances under which each of those approaches is considered suitable have been outlined and the advantages and

disadvantages of using each of them identified. The choice of a method for a given research, being an important decision that affects the outcome of the research, has been clearly pointed out as well. The chapter further explains various sampling approaches and types, data collection and presentation as well as interpretation and analysis of research data. The last section of the chapter outlines various approaches to research in the study of religions, including phenomenology, lived religion and functionalism.

The thorny issue of ethics in research is taken up in chapter four. Ethical clearance is required for most credible institutions around the world when it comes to human and animal research. The need for ethical conduct in research practice and the necessity of informed consent in data collection, especially in human and animal research, but also in other studies involving sensitive data have been emphasised in this chapter. Being guided by ethical considerations in both data collection and data dissemination tends to enhance the integrity of the research process. Confidentiality and anonymity tend to be top of the agenda in many such researches. The chapter ends by discussing the critical issue of plagiarism (academic theft) which must be avoided at all costs if one's research is to be credible.

Chapter five provides some guidelines for the conduct of critical reviews in research studies to help the reader evaluate and critique various scholarly materials and their contribution to knowledge. A good critical review highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the text under review, to underscore its relevance to the body of knowledge to which it belongs. It can afford the reviewer the opportunity to identify gaps in the knowledge that may be filled in the research process.

The sixth chapter provides an overview of the thesis/dissertation writing process. The production of a thesis is a significant process, following many years of study, research and intellectual rigour. Knowing thoroughly what is involved in the process becomes a catalyst for the writing process. The chapter takes the reader through a step-by-step process of outlining and writing out the preliminary pages, the main body and the references to the thesis or dissertation. This careful arrangement of the thesis/dissertation enables the researcher to produce

a coherent document that is consistent with the standard requirements of scholarly writing. The author gives several examples to guide the writing process.

Chapter seven, which brings the discussions to an end, emphasises quality assurance in thesis writing. It covers essential elements such as the effective use of transitions to ensure coherence, the importance of paraphrasing to integrate research without plagiarism and the selection of appropriate sources. The chapter further deals with the subject of research supervision. Boaheng offers insights into how to maintain productive communication between students and supervisors, set clear expectations, provide constructive feedback and ensure that students adhere to academic standards and deadlines throughout the research process.

The book stands as a resource for anyone venturing into academic research in theology and religious studies. This guide equips readers with the essential tools and knowledge needed to conduct rigorous and impactful research. Whether you are a novice researcher or an experienced scholar, this book is designed to enhance your research skills and contribute meaningfully to the body of knowledge in theology and religious studies.

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## CHAPTER ONE THE CONCEPT OF RESEARCH

As we begin this journey, I want you to ponder these questions: (i). What topic do you have in mind? (ii). Why does it interest you? (iii). From what theological sub-discipline (eg. pastoral, biblical, missiological) will you approach it? (iv). What questions emerge as you reflect on the topic? (v). How will you search for data/information on the topic? The five questions posed above capture the essence of research thesis/dissertation<sup>1</sup> writing in a way. Writing a thesis requires one to have a topic that is of great interest to them, in a specific academic (sub) discipline, that provokes certain questions that can be answered by gathering and analysing relevant data. Therefore, by engaging the above questions, one lays the groundwork for a research thesis that is not only academically rigorous but also personally meaningful and intellectually stimulating.

This book introduces the reader to the basics of academic research and writing. It considers general research methods for Social Science research which I find very common in universities and seminaries across the African continent. In this introductory chapter, I explore key fundamental aspects of research. I address pivotal questions like “What is research?” The chapter provides a roadmap for aspiring (young) researchers by uncovering the essential steps in conducting research and identifying common pitfalls to avoid.

### 1.1 What is Research?

Everybody undertakes research at one time or the other. In our daily lives, we search for information to solve problems. Therefore, research is not new to us. However, academic research<sup>2</sup> differs from

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the distinction that is sometimes placed between thesis and dissertation, I use them synonymously in this work.

<sup>2</sup> I will not be using the expression “academic research” all the time. The term “research” when used without any qualifier should be taken as “academic research.”

the everyday research that everyone undertakes. So it is important for me to explain what academic research entails.

However, before I define what academic research is, permit me to outline what it is not.<sup>3</sup>

1. Research is not a mere collection of data or information gathering; research requires information gathering but that alone does not constitute research.
2. Research is not simply transferring facts from one source to another.
3. Research is not merely sifting through files or documents without purposeful action.
4. Research is not merely assembling quotations; whilst quotations may support findings, research involves more than just compiling quotes.
5. Research is not merely paraphrasing or restating other people's words and ideas without adding value or without analysis.
6. Research is not a defence or justification of personal beliefs or convictions.
7. Research is not necessarily polemical; it aims to present truth objectively, without engaging in contentious arguments or attacking others' positions.
8. Research is not the expression of personal opinions; it requires the presentation of facts, data, and evidence to support conclusions.
9. Research, particularly in theology and religion, is not preaching; it is the dissemination of factual information aimed at informing and persuading the intellect, without embellishment or persuasion beyond what is supported by evidence.

From our everyday experiences, research may simply be considered as gathering information to solve problems. Whilst such

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "What is Research?" (2020) (<https://blog.noyam.org/what-is-research/>)

a definition is enough from a layperson's perspective, it does not fit what academic research is. For research to be considered academic, it must follow an acceptable, planned, systematic and objective procedure. Nancy Jean Vyhmeister defines it as "a method of study that, through careful investigation of all evidence bearing on a definable problem, arrives at a solution."<sup>4</sup> Research, then, involves identifying a problem, collecting data, processing/evaluating the data and presenting findings/results to solve the problem.<sup>5</sup>

Academic research, therefore, refers to a planned, systematic and objective search for and gathering of information about a specific topic/problem, usually to solve a problem, establish facts and reach new conclusions. In other words, it is a meticulous and thorough scrutiny and comprehensive investigation or experimentation, undertaken to uncover new information and ensure its accurate interpretation. This may involve reassessing established conclusions, theories, or laws in the light of fresh discoveries, or applying these findings in practical contexts.

Research is different from investigation in that the latter entails a critical examination or scrutiny of certain presumed or suspected facts, whereas the former involves a systematic inquiry conducted in a particular way.<sup>6</sup> However, research necessarily involves an investigation to throw more light on the existing research problem, validate existing theories, or solve problems.<sup>7</sup> In research, one carefully investigates all evidence bearing on a definable problem and then arrives at a solution. Research does not end after gathering the necessary data. It continues with the organisation, evaluation, presentation and interpretation/analysis of data collected. Through analyses, the researcher provides conclusions or solutions to the problem at hand.

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Tom K. B. Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2002), 22.

<sup>7</sup> Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 22.

Furthermore, research is the search for truth, be it historical, scientific, or theological truth. God is the source of truth and has a key role to play in making research endeavours successful. Fundamentally, research expands our knowledge about the world and helps us to better understand the world we live in.

Research may be descriptive, explanatory, or predictive. Descriptive research describes phenomena without giving reasons why a behaviour is the way it is. It does not, therefore, give an adequate understanding of our observations. Explanatory research both describes phenomena and gives reasons why a behaviour is the way it is. Predictive research explains behavior and, at the same time, predicts (future) behavior given a change in any of the explanatory variables relevant to a particular phenomenon.

Research documents must follow formal language as much as possible. Most institutions require the researcher to avoid the use of first-person pronouns if they refer to the writer. One also has to avoid sexist pronouns such as “he” for both males and females as most institutions and professors support all-inclusive language. There is a need to ensure clarity of expression in order not to leave the reader confused.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2 Logical Procedure for Research

Research is not done anyhow; it must follow a certain logically arranged procedure. Paul D. Leedy outlines the following eight (8) distinct characteristics of the procedure involved in research, an outline of which I present below.<sup>9</sup>

Firstly, research originates from the researcher’s mind. It is driven by a curious, observant, and inquisitive attitude that acknowledges the existence of problem situations requiring further investigation.

Secondly, research necessitates the articulation of a specific goal for the investigative process. This specific goal is often referred

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<sup>8</sup> I will say more about this in chapter 7.

<sup>9</sup> Paul D. Leedy, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (5th ed) (New York: MacMillan, 1993), 12.

to as the **statement of the research problem**. This statement serves as the foundational framework that delineates the precise focus and direction of the research endeavour, and hence provides clarity and coherence to the investigative process.

Thirdly, research requires a concrete plan of action (the research method). This plan outlines the procedural steps to be followed. It must be executable, time-bound, result-oriented and realistic.

Fourthly, research underscores that tackling the entire problem at once is often overwhelming. Therefore, problems are typically subdivided into manageable sub-problems to allow for a step-by-step resolution.

Fifthly, research is guided by constructs known as **hypotheses** which play a pivotal role in framing research inquiries and guiding the investigative process. These hypotheses are formulated based on existing knowledge, theoretical frameworks, or empirical observations. They function as testable propositions that guide researchers in systematically exploring, analysing, and interpreting data to validate or refute underlying assumptions or expectations within the research domain.

The sixth feature is that research operates based on certain critical assumptions that are foundational and indispensable for the progression of the research endeavour. These assumptions are often rooted in established paradigms or disciplinary frameworks. They shape the researcher's worldview and guide their approach to inquiry, interpretation of findings, and dissemination of knowledge.

The seventh aspect of the logical procedure for research is that research necessitates the systematic collection and meticulous interpretation of data to address the problem. The data collected may be empirical or non-empirical depending on the problem, at hand and the researcher's preference, among other factors.

Finally, research is inherently a cyclical or, more precisely, a helical process. This means that it involves iterative (repetitious) stages of inquiry and refinement. Each stage of research builds upon

the previous ones, often revisiting earlier questions with new insights and refined methods.

Everybody can conduct a research, but not everyone can be a good researcher. In the section below, I outline some characteristics of a good researcher.

### 1.3 Features of a Good Researcher

For the researcher to achieve the aim of a research they must exhibit certain features. The following are some of the key features.

1. **Curiosity:** A good researcher possesses a natural inclination toward curiosity. This inclination drives the person to explore and inquire about various phenomena and to strive to understand underlying principles and uncover new knowledge.<sup>10</sup>
2. **Critical thinking:** A good researcher demonstrates strong critical thinking skills that allow them to evaluate information, identify biases, question assumptions, and draw logical conclusions based on evidence and reasoning.<sup>11</sup>
3. **Creativity:** A good researcher exhibits creativity in their approach to problem-solving and inquiry.<sup>12</sup> They use innovative methods, frameworks, or hypotheses to address research questions and challenges. Innovation and creativity are especially needed to contribute to knowledge through research. Especially in empirical research, the interpretation and analysis of data require creative and innovative skills.
4. **Attention to detail:** A good researcher pays meticulous attention to detail in all aspects of their research, from designing (or choosing) methodologies to collecting and

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<sup>10</sup> Luis H. Toledo-Pereyra, "Ten Qualities of a Good Researcher," *Journal of Investigative Surgery*, 25, (2012): 201–202, 201; Val Hyginus Udoka Ese et. al, "Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Scientific Research Writing: Step-by-Step Approaches," *IAA Journal of Applied Sciences* 9(2) (2023): 71-76, 74.

<sup>11</sup> Ese et. al, "Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Scientific Research Writing," 74-75.

<sup>12</sup> Ese et. al, "Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Scientific Research Writing," 74.

analysing data. This ensures accuracy, reliability, and validity in their findings.

5. **Analytical skills:** A good researcher possesses strong analytical skills to correctly interpret complex data, identify patterns, trends, and relationships, and draw meaningful insights from their analyses.<sup>13</sup>
6. **Adaptability:** A good researcher demonstrates adaptability and flexibility to respond to unexpected challenges or changing circumstances during the research process. This helps the researcher to adjust methodologies or strategies as needed to achieve research objectives.
7. **Ethical integrity:** A good researcher adheres to high ethical standards in their work and prioritises the well-being and rights of research participants. They maintain confidentiality and uphold honesty, transparency, and integrity throughout the research process.
8. **Communication skills:** A good researcher communicates their research findings effectively to diverse audiences, both orally and in writing, using clear and concise language.<sup>14</sup> They adapt their communication style to suit the needs of their audience.
9. **Collaboration:** A good researcher recognises the value of collaboration and teamwork. Therefore, they leverage the expertise and perspectives of colleagues, mentors, or interdisciplinary partners to enhance the quality and impact of their research.
10. **Persistence:** A good researcher exhibits perseverance and resilience in the face of challenges or setbacks.<sup>15</sup> They remain committed to their research goals and objectives and persistently pursue solutions to complex problems.

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<sup>13</sup> Ese et. al, "Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Scientific Research Writing," 75.

<sup>14</sup> Ese et. al, "Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Scientific Research Writing," 75.

<sup>15</sup> Luba Jakubowska, "Seniors as a research group in the experimental model," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* No. 2 (2012): 27-35, 34; Ese et. al, "Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Scientific Research Writing," 75.

11. **Open-mindedness:** A good researcher approaches their work with an open mind and objectivity.<sup>16</sup> They remain receptive to new ideas, perspectives, and evidence, and are willing to reconsider their assumptions or hypotheses in light of new information.
12. **Effective time manager:** A good researcher effectively manages their time and resources. They set realistic goals, priorities, and deadlines, and allocate sufficient time for each stage of the research process to ensure timely completion of their projects.
13. **Technological proficiency:** In today's era, a good researcher needs to grasp the functionality of a range of analytical tools and software accessible for data acquisition and analysis.<sup>17</sup> It is not sufficient merely to employ these tools to enhance the appeal of one's research; one must also comprehend their suitability for the task at hand. Therefore, one has to be technologically proficient to be able to excel as a researcher.

What makes one's research good? The next section considers this question.

#### **1.4 General Characteristics of a Good Research**

Not every research meets academic standards. For research to be academically accepted, it must demonstrate some key features. In this section, some of these features are outlined.

##### ***Focused/Specific***

A good research has a sharp focus. It is focused on a specific problem/topic. For large topics, adequate research becomes virtually impossible. The researcher must, therefore, clearly delineate the problem they intend to deal with. For this reason, research thinking

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<sup>16</sup> Ese et. al, "Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Scientific Research Writing," 75.

<sup>17</sup> Ese et. al, "Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Scientific Research Writing," 75.

must be straight to the point without the least deviation.<sup>18</sup> This is the reason why research cannot start without first defining the research problem and how the researcher intends to address it.

### ***Objective***

A good research is not about what the researcher feels; rather, it is what the reality is that is reported. Personal preferences, convictions, prejudices, biases, attitudes, and feelings must not influence one's observations.<sup>19</sup> The researcher must be as objective as possible as subjectivity tends to interfere with clear and accurate reception. Conclusions are drawn based on facts not on possibilities and conjectures. Therefore, the researcher must try as much as possible to avoid being biased by involving the mind (not the heart) in research.

### ***Problem-Solving***

A good research aims at solving a problem(s), be it theological, physical, social, educational, or managerial. The motivation for the research is to have a solution to the problem. Research aims at solving a problem(s) to improve the quality of life.

### ***Systematic***

A good research is systematic in the sense that it does not just happen but proceeds through a series of steps and stages.<sup>20</sup> There is order in the procedure. It follows a logically laid down procedure which must be understood by the researcher. It involves adequate planning to achieve results. Without following the laid down procedure, one's research will be poor and unacceptable.

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<sup>18</sup> N. J. Vyhmeister and T. D. Robertson, *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervon, 2014), 100.

<sup>19</sup> Vyhmeister and Robertson, *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers*, 100.

<sup>20</sup> Ese et. al, "Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Scientific Research Writing," 74.

### ***Accurate and Precise***

A good research is based on accurate observable experiences and descriptions. There must be a correspondence between what is said, what is observed, and what has actually occurred. There must also be precision regarding the estimation of the exact amount of the event that has occurred or may yet occur. To achieve precision, the researcher may have to use tools from the discipline under study.

### ***Contribution to Knowledge***

A good research generates new findings that expand existing knowledge and deepen understanding within its field.<sup>21</sup> So a critical question that is often asked during thesis defense is: What contribution does this thesis make to academia? Or: How does this thesis contribute to knowledge in your field of study? In addition to contributing knowledge, a good research may also innovate methodologies or tools to enhance research processes and explore new avenues.

## **1.5 Importance of Research**

Research is the cornerstone of progress and advancement across various fields of study and disciplines. Its significance spans from uncovering new knowledge to solving complex problems and informing decision-making processes. Below are some of the significance of research.

- i. Research improves the quality of life. Through research solutions to problems are found.
- ii. Research teaches one how to recognise a problem and how to go about solving it.
- iii. Research helps the researcher to develop analytical skills.
- iv. Research helps the researcher to develop character. Through research, one learns to meet deadlines and be honest in dealing with their presentation.
- v. Research also helps one to develop good writing skills.

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<sup>21</sup> Ese et. al, "Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Scientific Research Writing," 74.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has set the agenda for the entire study by elucidating the essence, purpose, and significance of research within the scholarly landscape. I have outlined the importance of critical thinking, curiosity, and intellectual integrity in the research process. In the chapters that follow, I will expand the ideas in this chapter. The next chapter deals with the research proposal, a very crucial part of any academic research.

## **1.7 Review Exercise**

1. Explain the term research. How different is research from investigation?
2. Why is it necessary to conduct research in our societies?
3. Critically examine four possible causes of students' failure in research papers.
4. Discuss three characteristics of a good research work.
5. How would you determine the quality of a research work?
6. Can anybody be a good researcher? Discuss Why should the researcher be a critical thinker?
7. Discuss how people can improve upon their research skills.
8. What is the place of technology in modern research?
9. Why should a research follow specific procedure?

## CHAPTER TWO

### WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The research proposal is the starting point for any academic research. The quality of one's proposal speaks volumes about their preparedness to undertake independent research.<sup>22</sup> The actual research cannot commence without the supervisor's approval of the research proposal. Yet, it is not every research proposal can be approved. For it to be approved, it must meet certain criteria. For this reason, it behoves the researcher to be conversant with the requirements of a good proposal and work towards achieving them. Unfortunately, people either find it difficult to access materials on the subject, or they find the available materials not dealing adequately with the difficulties researchers encounter in their study. It is against this backdrop, that this chapter gives a step-by-step approach to developing a well-structured research proposal that can produce focused and disciplined theses. To this end, the chapter deals with what a research proposal is, its significance, and how it should be prepared.

#### 2.1 What is a Research Proposal?

A research proposal is a document that outlines how a researcher intends to go about a particular research work.<sup>23</sup> The proposal gives an account of what will be studied (the research problem) and how it will be studied (the research plan).<sup>24</sup> According to Matt Henn *et. al*, a research proposal “is a written plan for a study. It spells out in detail what the researcher intends to do.”<sup>25</sup> The proposal must be informative, telling the reader about the kind of research to be

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<sup>22</sup> Kevin Gary Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research: A Guide for Students* (Johannesburg: South African Theological Seminary Press, 2008), 113 (pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Johann Mouton, *How to Succeed in your Masters and Doctoral Studies* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2001), 44-45.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 113

<sup>25</sup> Matt Henn *et. al*, *A Short Introduction to Social Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 257

undertaken, and at the same time persuasive, convincing the reader about the researcher's preparedness to undertake the research.

A research proposal is typically written in the future tense, as it outlines a plan for conducting research that has not yet been carried out. However, certain sections of the proposal, such as the literature review section, may include past tense when discussing previous research. When the research is completed, the proposal is revised into the past tense. Usually, the revised version becomes the first chapter of the thesis. In some cases, a supervisor may ask the researcher to write one or more of its components as chapters on their own. In other words, a supervisor may ask the student to write an aspect of the proposal as a chapter on its own. This, for example, may be the literature review or methodology. When this happens, those written as separate chapters (for example, the literature review and methodology) no more form part of chapter one, the revised proposal. They now become chapters on their own. Yet, the abridged form of these components must be part of the original proposal presented for the supervisor's approval and subsequent approval by the institution's research committee (if applicable).

## **2.2 Why a Research Proposal?**

As hinted previously, research is an academic journey that has a starting point and a destination. Without adequate preparation, the researcher cannot succeed. The success of the research requires adequate planning. The research proposal ensures that adequate planning is done before the research begins. A research proposal is a comprehensive document that outlines a research problem and the plan for conducting the study. It serves as the researcher's road map, itinerary, advanced preparations, and provisions made for the journey. Without it, the researcher can easily get lost (not getting to their destination) or experience delays. The success of the actual research depends on the value of the proposal. Kevin Gary Smith

says, “Prepare a good proposal and your research will flow; prepare a poor one and it will flop.”<sup>26</sup>

The research proposal also gives the researcher a better foresight for their work.<sup>27</sup> This puts them in a good position to visualise, ahead of time, the major pitfalls to avoid in their study. The proposal offers the researcher the opportunity to convince others (especially their supervisor or funding agencies) that they have a great research idea and have what it takes to put these ideas into clear and logical writing and to complete it on time.<sup>28</sup> In other words, it informs the supervisor as to what to expect from the researcher and whether the researcher has done enough thinking about the topic and sufficient preparation for the research. As Merbouh Zouaoui puts it, the proposal “is intended to convince others that the student has a worthwhile research project and that s/he has the competence and the work plan to complete it.”<sup>29</sup>

In the next section, I outline the various components that come together to form a research proposal.

### **2.3 The Essential Elements of a Research Proposal**

A research proposal can be divided into two main parts, namely, the research **problem** and the research **plan**. The research problem has to do with the issue that one intends to study (investigate). The research plan deals with how one intends to investigate the research problem. Even though research proposals differ from subject area to subject area and from institution to institution, there are some central features common to all proposals. These common features include:

- i. Research topic (title)
- ii. Background to the study
- iii. Justification of the research

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<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 115.

<sup>27</sup> Mouton, *How to Succeed in your Masters and Doctoral Studies*, 45.

<sup>28</sup> Colin Robson, *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers* 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), Appendix A.

<sup>29</sup> Merbouh Zouaoui, The Importance of Research Proposal (No. 8) 39-47, 39 (from [https://www.univ-sba.dz/med\\_dialogue/images/Article.8/23.pdf](https://www.univ-sba.dz/med_dialogue/images/Article.8/23.pdf))

- iv. Motivation for the study
- v. Statement of the research problem
- vi. Research question(s)
- vii. Aim/ Objective/Purpose of the study
- viii. Research hypothesis
- ix. Significance of the study
- x. Research design and methodology
- xi. Limitation(s) and delimitation(s) (Scope of the research)
- xii. Literature review
- xiii. Organisation of study
- xiv. Definition of terms (if applicable)
- xv. Ethical issues
- xvi. Bibliography
- xvii. Timetable/work plan for the research

Some institutions may or may not include all these elements. The student is, therefore, encouraged to consult their supervisor or their institution's policy on this before drafting the proposal. I shall now proceed to examine each of these key components briefly.

### **Research Topic (Title)**

A research topic is a specific, brief, clear, and informative statement reflecting the nature and scope of the research. Finding an appropriate research topic and concentrating on it can be very difficult for beginning researchers. Ideas for research topics may come from sources such as academic journals, existing theses/dissertations, and everyday situations, including conversations with others, news on radio and television (TV), or any existing literature. As one goes through what people have written on a particular subject or reflects on issues arising from what is read, new ideas may emerge for further research. Normally, researchers conclude their work by stating some problems that can be investigated further. Those suggestions can also be explored. Research abstracts can also lead one to formulate a research topic.

Factors to consider when choosing a research topic include the researcher's knowledge of the topic, the researcher's interest, availability of material/resources, potential contribution to knowledge (potential of filling a research gap), the significance of the topic to the society, religious body (like the church) and the academic community, relationship to one's program of study, page limit (word-count) and time limit, among others.

The topic must be informative but brief or precise. Normally, the topic is not expected to be a sentence (subject + verb + predicate). As such, the topic does not ordinarily have a full stop at the end. It may, however, have an exclamation or question mark if it is an exclamation or a question. Obscure and unnecessarily lengthy titles must be avoided. The topic must be definable and be one that can really be investigated.

The research topic may take different forms. It may be **descriptive**, describing the focus of the research study without providing specific details about the methodology or findings. Example: "A Study of Environmental Pollution in Urban Areas." It may be **explanatory**, providing insight into the research question or problem being addressed in the study. Example: "Investigating the Relationship between Social Media Usage and Mental Health in Adolescents in Liberia." The topic may be **comparative**, involving the comparison of two or more variables, groups, or phenomena. Example: "A Comparative Study of Hindu and Christian Doctrines of Salvation." It may be **exploratory**, seeking to explore a new topic, area, or phenomenon to generate initial insights or hypotheses. Example: "Exploring the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare Innovation in Nigeria."

Researchers/students must avoid broad topics. A topic like "The dietary pattern of all Ghanaians with genotype AS" is too broad and cannot be a good topic for research. It can be narrowed to "The dietary pattern of Ghanaians with genotype AS in Abesim Presbyterian JHS 3." Here, it focuses on Abesim (a suburb of Sunyani in the Bono Region of Ghana) and then narrows to Presbyterian JHS 3. Researchers are advised to pick up practical and

useful research topics so that their theses may be of immediate use to others.

Research topic may have two parts; the main topic and the subtopic. An example is “Cruciformity in Pauline Theology: Implications for Contemporary African Christians.” The main topic serves as the broader theme or subject of the research, whereas the subtopic narrows the focus by specifying a particular angle, perspective, or application within that main topic. This structure helps researchers to delineate the scope of their study and provides clarity for both the author and the readers about what aspects of the main topic will be explored and analysed. In the example provided, “Cruciformity in Pauline Theology” is the main topic, meaning the research will delve into the concept of cruciformity (the state of being shaped or molded by the cross) within the theological framework presented in the writings of the apostle Paul. The subtopic, “Implications for Contemporary African Christians,” narrows the focus of the research by specifying the particular context or audience to which the findings of the study will be applied. It suggests that the research will not only analyse cruciformity in Pauline theology but also explore its relevance, impact, and practical implications for the lives and beliefs of contemporary African Christians. This subtopic adds a dimension of application and relevance to the research, highlighting its potential significance for a specific group or community.

### **Background to the Study**

This part of the proposal explains the problem that the study addresses and sets it in its political, historical, educational, philosophical, religious, biblical, or theological context (among others).<sup>30</sup> To this end, the researcher gives a brief account of their understanding of the topic by stating what previous writers have said about the topic and the root and scope of the research problem.

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<sup>30</sup> Seth Kissi, *Thesis Writing: Addressing Some Common Problems of Students* (Accra: Pinpoint Media, 2012), 7.

Recent developments and debates on the topic, as well as the extent to which previous studies have successfully investigated the problem, should also be explored.

As a rule: **Start on a broad note and then narrow it down to your topic.** In my PhD thesis on the doctrine of atonement, I wrote approximately four pages for the background.<sup>31</sup> Of the six paragraphs that make up the background, the first three are general, considering Christianity in Africa/Ghana and Christian soteriology. It can serve as introductory paragraphs for virtually every subject in the area of Christian soteriology. It was in the fourth paragraph that it becomes clear to the reader that my focus is the doctrine of atonement. My strategy was to start on a general note and then narrow the scope to the specific subject under study.

The background must indicate the gap(s) in knowledge, an unclear situation, an unresolved question, a lack of information on the proposed topic, or any circumstance that has led to the proposed study. All that is discussed in this section must lead up to the research problem. Yet, the problem should not be stated explicitly at this point. The background should reveal it but not state the research problem explicitly. There is another section for it. The more one gets closer to the end of the background the more explicit the issues at stake should become, and the more clearly the reader may know the research gaps and hence, be able to predict more accurately the research problem.

Some key questions to address in this section are: What conditions have led you to propose your research project and to define your aim/s in the way that you have done? How did previous researchers define the problem/variables, and how did they go about solving/addressing it? What is my main interest in the research project? Why is this main issue of interest worthy of academic investigation?<sup>32</sup> These questions must be answered in this section of the proposal.

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<sup>31</sup> For more on this consult Isaac Boaheng, *A contextual theology of atonement for the Akan society of Ghana* (PhD Thesis: University of the Free State, 2021), 1-4.

<sup>32</sup> This question relates to the justification of the research. See the discussions below.

The ideas expressed in the background of the study come mainly from the preliminary literature review undertaken by the researcher. Nonetheless, this section differs from the actual literature review. The supervisor, together with the researcher, determines the length of the study background. The background is written in a freestyle and it is expected to be both persuasive and engaging to the reader. Some institutions require students to justify their project either in the background section or as a separate section in the proposal.

### **Justification/Rationale for the Study**

The justification or rationale elucidates the necessity of the research by delineating the gaps the research seeks to address within the existing literature, its contributions to knowledge, or the solutions it intends to offer. When placed in the introduction, it serves to contextualise the study. The justification results (emerge) from a comprehensive literature survey to identify any gaps or areas yet to be explored within the current body of knowledge. So, the justification is built around the gaps. The identified gaps serve to justify the need for the research.

The justification is similar to the significance of the research, but they differ. The table below throws light on this.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Justification</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Definition	Explanation of why the research is worthy of undertaking	Clarification of the importance and relevance of the research topic
Focus	Addresses the overall rationale for conducting the study	Emphasises the impact, relevance, and contribution of the research
Purpose	Convinces supervisors or readers of the merit of the research	Highlights the broader implications and potential benefits of the research
Content	Discusses the reasons behind conducting the research	Describes the importance of the research within the academic or real-world context
Elements	Originality, feasibility, relevance	Novelty, uniqueness, applicability, potential impact
Perspective	Internal (within the research framework)	External (within the broader academic or societal context)

*Table 1.1: Comparison between Justification and Significance of Research*

### **Motivation for the Study**

The motivation for the study refers to the underlying reasons or driving forces that prompt researchers to undertake a particular research.<sup>33</sup> The motivation has to do with the underlying reasons and personal or academic drivers that inspire the researcher to conduct the study. Motivation differs from justification. Motivation focuses on internal drivers and interests, whereas justification focuses on external needs and contributions. Motivation may include personal

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<sup>33</sup> Kissi, *Thesis Writing*, 7.

anecdotes or interests, whereas justification includes logical arguments and evidence to support the need to conduct the research. Researchers are motivated by a variety of factors, including personal interests, professional or academic goals, real-world problems, and the desire to fill knowledge gaps.

Personal interest in the topic may result from the researcher's curiosity and passion for a particular topic. The topic may also align with the researcher's career objectives or academic interests. This means a researcher may choose a topic because that topic contributes to their career advancement and expertise in the field. Observing real-world problems prompts researchers to address pressing issues and provide practical solutions. A researcher may be motivated by existing knowledge gaps that need to be filled. The motivation, then, is the desire to fill knowledge gaps and contribute new insights and advance the existing body of knowledge. Whatever the case may be, the section on motivation must provide compelling evidence that the research is necessary, timely, and worthy of pursuit. Questions to consider here include: What prompted the choice of the topic? What motivates you to undertake this project? The following is a sample motivation for a study on the Matthean Beatitudes:

### **Example**

Two main situations serve as motivation for undertaking this research. First, the researcher, on 2nd August 2015, led a Bible study on the Beatitudes (from the Methodist Weekly Bible Lesson). Contributions made by church members indicated that most of them had a poor understanding of the Beatitudes. For example, someone interpreted "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:6) as physical thirst and hunger for water and food respectively. Given that the Beatitudes constitute one of the most important passages on discipleship, the researcher was motivated to make further studies to appreciate and understand the passage and help other disciples appreciate it too. In addition, the 2017 connexion theme of the Methodist Church Ghana, "Go and make disciples of all nations: Rekindling the Methodist Evangelical Heritage for Church growth",

serves as a motivation for the researcher to undertake this study as part of his contribution to the church in realising the set goal.<sup>34</sup>

### Comment

In this example, the writer outlines two situations that prompted him to undertake the research. The two factors are the realisation during a Bible study session on the Beatitudes that many church members had a limited understanding of the passage and the Methodist Church Ghana's 2017 connexion theme that focused on rekindling the Methodist evangelical heritage for church growth.

### Statement of the Research Problem

Every research is informed by the desire (or the need) to address/study/investigate a problem. The statement of the research problem is a concise and clear articulation of the specific issue or question that the research aims to address.<sup>35</sup> It defines the focus of the research and outlines the central problem or inquiry that the study seeks to investigate. It serves as the foundation for the entire research project and guides the formulation of research questions, hypotheses, and objectives.

The statement of the research problem usually arises from the research background and it is supposed to be stated clearly in specific terms, usually a sentence or at most a very short paragraph. In the background, the research problem is implied but in the current section (that is, "statement of the research problem" section) it is stated explicitly. The research problem must achieve such clarity and precision that will be understandable to anyone who reads it.<sup>36</sup> For Smith, "**The golden rule for formulating a research problem is that you must state it in a single sentence!**"<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Isaac Boaheng, *The Matthean Beatitudes: Lessons for Contemporary Discipleship* (Unpublished Short Essay Submitted to the Methodist Church Ghana, 2017), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Leedy, *Practical Research*, 59-60.

<sup>36</sup> Leedy, *Practical Research*, 60.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 132.

However, the practice in some institutions is to elaborate the research problem in a number of paragraphs. My observation is that the elaborated form of the research problem usually includes the justification for the research. In other words, institutions that ask their students to elaborate on the research problem require that they use this section to identify the gaps and then explain why those gaps need to be filled. One has to follow the requirements of their supervisor or institution. The research problem pinpoints the exact issue to be studied, while the justification for the research explains why this study is important (necessary) and timely.

The research problem is usually formulated in a statement form. One has to be specific, focused, and realistic. Avoid overly broad or general statements. Narrow down the scope of the problem to ensure that it is manageable within the constraints of the research project. And ensure that the research problem is feasible and achievable within the resources and timeframe available for the study. To put everything in a statement: **Be sure to write a clear, valid, true, concise and “solid” research problem.**

### ***Difference between Research Problem and Real Life Problem***

Research problems and real-life problems serve distinct purposes and exist within different contexts. Research problems are formulated within the realm of academic inquiry, with the aim of advancing knowledge and understanding within a specific field or discipline. These problems often relate to theoretical concepts, hypotheses testing, or filling gaps in existing literature. For example, a research problem in psychology could involve investigating the impact of different parenting styles on child development. This problem is designed to explore theoretical constructs and contribute to the scholarly discourse on parenting practices and child outcomes.

On the other hand, real-life problems are practical challenges or issues encountered by individuals, organisations, or communities in their daily lives or professional endeavours. These problems are often complex and multifaceted, affecting people's well-being, productivity, or quality of life. Unlike research problems, real-life

problems emerge from real-world circumstances and experiences rather than from academic inquiry. For instance, a parent struggling to manage their child's behavior at home faces a real-life problem. This parent may seek practical strategies for improving parent-child interactions and addressing behavioral issues. In this case, one seeks solutions that are immediately applicable to their everyday life.

While research problems aim to contribute to theoretical knowledge and academic discourse, real-life problems require practical solutions to address tangible challenges faced by individuals or communities. The resolution of real-life problems may involve interventions, support services, or practical strategies tailored to specific circumstances. Although research problems and real-life problems serve different purposes and contexts, addressing real-life problems can often benefit from insights gained through rigorous academic research and scholarly inquiry. Therefore, bridging the gap between research and practice is essential for effectively addressing real-life problems and improving outcomes for individuals and communities.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions are questions the researcher asks whilst attempting to address or provide resolutions to the research problem. There is the main research question that captures the main essence of the research topic and subsidiary questions that assist in breaking the main research question down into manageable sections. The questions can start with “can?”, “should?”, “is?”, “how?”, “what?” and “why?” among others.

The main research question must be formulated in such a way that it reflects the title<sup>38</sup> and main objective of the research. The researcher must not raise questions/issues that they are not ready to answer. The main research question may be broken into smaller key research questions (subsidiary research questions), each of which

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<sup>38</sup> For examples on this, consult Isaac Boaheng, *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies* (Accra: Noyam Publishers, 2024).

deals with an aspect of the main research question or the research problem.

The subsidiary questions are the specific questions that need to be answered in order to answer the main research question or solve the research problem. The following points must be noted about the formulation of the sub-questions (subsidiary questions).

1. Each sub-question (subsidiary question) should be a distinct and researchable unit, constituting a logical subarea of the larger research undertaking.
2. Sub-questions must directly contribute to addressing the main research question.
3. All the sub-questions put together must address the entirety of the main research problem without redundancy or omission.
4. Subsidiary questions should be structured in a sequential manner, where each question naturally leads to the next, forming a coherent chain of inquiry. This approach ensures that the research progresses logically from one aspect to another and also facilitates a systematic exploration of the topic.
5. Avoid the proliferation of sub-questions; three to five (or six) sub-questions should be enough.
6. Whether writing the main or subsidiary questions, avoid questions that are too broad, too vague, or too narrow or questions that can be answered by “yes” or “no”.
7. Questions should be clear concepts that facilitate an original contribution to the study and the focus of the research.

Imagine a study whose research problem is that there is misconception and confusion about the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility among Shona Christians. The research questions could be stated as follows.

## **Main Research Question**

How might we explain (or establish) the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility to address misconceptions and confusion among the Shona Christian community of Zimbabwe?

## **Subsidiary Questions**

- i. What misconceptions exist in the Shona community regarding God's sovereignty and human responsibility?
- ii. What are the views of key African philosophers and theologians on the sovereignty-responsibility tension?
- iii. What does the Bible teach about the doctrines of God's divine sovereignty and human responsibility?
- iv. How can God be sovereign and yet not be responsible for the choices that humans make?
- v. How might we apply the findings from the research to address confusion among the Shona Christian community?

## **Aims/Objectives/Purpose of the Study**

This section deals with the desired outcomes or the general intentions of the research. That is, what the destination of your research activities is. It must relate to the title and the research problem. In fact, they must logically emerge from the main research problem.<sup>39</sup> This section answers the question: What do I want to achieve through the research? It is helpful to begin your aim/s with words like: investigate, study, analyse, determine, interpret, demarcate, critique, compare, contrast, examine, identify, evaluate, assess and others. Avoid such weak verbs as appreciate, understand, or believe.

The aim/objective/purpose usually comes after the research questions. There could be the main aim/objective/purpose and subsidiary ones. The clue is that the main aim/objective/purpose derives from the main research question. Also, the subsidiary aims/objectives/purposes derive from the subsidiary research

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<sup>39</sup> Samuel B. Adubofour (ed.), *Research Writing Manual for Project Work & Dissertation* edited and updated by (Kumasi: Christian Service University College, 2024), 10.

questions. The questions need to be put in statement form to arrive at the aims/objectives/purposes.

In a research on the topic “Exploring the Relationship between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility”, the researcher wrote the following aims.<sup>40</sup>

- i. Analyse the doctrines of God’s divine sovereignty and human responsibility from a biblical perspective.
- ii. Examine the question as to how God can be sovereign and yet not be responsible for the choices that humans make, especially in relation to salvation.
- iii. Discuss the opinions of some philosophers and theologians from Ghanaian universities and seminaries on the sovereignty-responsibility debate.

### **Significance/Value of the Study**

The significance of a study describes what contribution the study, upon completion, will make to the broad literature or set of broad educational problems. For Seth Kissi, this section has to do with the problems “the researcher hopes to solve through the research.”<sup>41</sup> These problems may be related to the society, relevant industries, the church (religious bodies), individuals and the academic community. So the relevance of the outcome of the study to the society, industry, religious bodies, and academia must all be outlined here. All of the above may not apply to every research; outline those that are applicable.

Two principles help to deal with this section. First, the significance of the study must be in line with the problem statement, stating what the study will contribute and who will benefit from it. As much as possible, there should be a one-to-one correspondence between the statement of the problem and the significance of the study. Second, it must be written from general to specific

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<sup>40</sup> This example was taken from Isaac Boaheng, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in God’s Plan of Salvation* (Master of Divinity Thesis: Trinity Theological Seminary, 2016), 6-7. I have modified them slightly.

<sup>41</sup> Kissi, *Thesis Writing*, 7.

contributions. For instance, one may write the significance of the study by stating its importance to society as a whole, then move on to its contribution to the church, the academy, and individuals. The example below may illustrate the foregoing.<sup>42</sup> In this example, the research aimed to formulate a contextual theology of atonement for the Akan community of Ghana to bring about positive reforms in Akan religio-ethical beliefs and practices.

The values of the study are evident in the following ways: (a). For the Akan society, the study has the potential to bring about theological, ethical and spiritual renewals that will foster improved God-human, human-human and human-environment relations. (b). The study will expand the church's scope on the subject of atonement. (c). For the intellectual community, the study has the potential to generate interest in the contextualisation of the death of Christ for the church in the Akan community. In this regard, the study serves as a springboard for future research on the subject. (d). The study has the potential of empowering Akan Christians to come to terms with the relevance of Christ's atonement to their spiritual struggles and hence enable them to develop greater confidence in him alone.

### **Research Hypothesis**

B. C. Nworgu defines a hypothesis as “a conjectural proposition, an informed, intelligent guess about the solution to a problem.”<sup>43</sup> For Leedy, “[h]ypotheses are tentative, intelligent guesses posited for the purpose of directing one's thinking towards the solution of the problem.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, a research hypothesis is a proposed solution to the research problem or a calculated guess as to what its results will be. It is a specific statement predicting in concrete (rather than theoretical) terms what the outcome of a research will be.

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<sup>42</sup> This example was taken (with modification) from Boaheng, *A contextual theology of atonement*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> B. C. Nworgu, *Educational Research: Basic Issues and Methodology* (Ibadan: Wisdom, 1991), 44.

<sup>44</sup> Leedy, *Practical Research*, 75

Throughout the work, the researcher seeks to test the veracity and validity of the hypothesis; they do not intend primarily to prove it.<sup>45</sup> The researcher runs the risk of distorting data derived from the research if their sole aim is to prove the hypothesis. A hypothesis is built on personal experience, a review of the related literature, consultations/focused interviews with the experts/professionals, or a combination of all. A good hypothesis is reasonable, testable and consistent with available facts and theory. Hypotheses and research questions are related. One hypothesis may be for the main research question and each sub-question may have a sub-hypothesis.<sup>46</sup> The hypothesis serves the following purposes.

- i. It offers explanations for the relationships between those variables that can be empirically tested.
- ii. It furnishes proof that the researcher has sufficient background knowledge to enable him/her to make suggestions in order to extend existing knowledge.
- iii. It gives direction to an investigation.
- iv. It structures the next phase in the investigation and therefore furnishes continuity to the examination of the problem.

### **Assumptions or Presuppositions**

Assumptions (or presuppositions) in research refer to beliefs, ideas, or propositions that are taken for granted or accepted as true without empirical evidence.<sup>47</sup> These assumptions underlie the theoretical framework and methodology of a research study and shape the researcher's perspective and approach to the topic. They are the givens, which we do not question or explain.<sup>48</sup> Assumptions can be explicit or implicit and may influence various aspects of the research process, including the formulation of research questions, the interpretation of data, and the conclusions drawn from the study. Common types of assumptions in research include:

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<sup>45</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 140.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 140.

<sup>47</sup> Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*, 43.

<sup>48</sup> Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*, 43.

### ***Ontological Assumptions***

These are assumptions about the nature of reality, existence, and the relationship between the researcher and the research subject. An ontological assumption in qualitative research might be the belief that reality is socially constructed. A researcher conducting a study on the experiences of marginalised communities might assume ontologically that individuals' identities and realities are influenced by societal power structures, discrimination, and social norms. Another example is this: A researcher investigating the effectiveness of community-based interventions for reducing poverty might assume that poverty is a real and measurable phenomenon with underlying causes that can be identified and addressed through targeted interventions. This assumption influences the researcher to use quantitative methods such as surveys and statistical analysis to identify correlations between various factors (e.g., education, employment, access to resources) and poverty outcomes.

### ***Epistemological Assumptions***

These are assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired. These assumptions influence the researcher's perspective on what constitutes valid evidence and acceptable methods of inquiry. An epistemological assumption in positivist research might be the belief in the existence of objective, verifiable truths. For example, a researcher investigating the relationship between exercise and mental health might assume that valid knowledge about this relationship can be obtained through empirical observation, measurement, and statistical analysis. This assumption influences the researcher to focus on quantifiable variables, such as the frequency and intensity of exercise, and to seek statistical correlations between these variables and measures of mental health outcomes.

### ***Methodological Assumptions***

They are assumptions about the appropriate methods and techniques for conducting research. These assumptions guide decisions about data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Methodological

assumptions can vary depending on the research paradigm and approach, such as quantitative or qualitative methods. For example, a researcher studying public opinion on environmental conservation may assume that survey respondents accurately report their level of support for environmental policies, even though self-reported data may be subject to biases or social desirability effects.

### ***Theoretical Assumptions***

These are assumptions about the theoretical frameworks or models used to interpret phenomena and generate hypotheses. They shape the researcher's understanding of the relationships between variables and the underlying mechanisms at play in the research context. For example, a researcher exploring the impact of parental bonding on adolescents' mental health might assume that secure attachment to parents in childhood fosters emotional resilience and psychological well-being in adolescence, based on the theoretical principles of attachment theory.

### ***Contextual Assumptions***

They are assumptions about the social, cultural, historical, or organisational context in which the research takes place. These assumptions influence how the research is situated within its broader context and may affect the generalisability of findings. For instance, a researcher investigating leadership styles in different organisational cultures may assume that leadership effectiveness is influenced by cultural factors such as collectivism versus individualism, hierarchy, and communication styles prevalent in each organisational context.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

The research design has to do with the general approach used in addressing the research problem. It is a structured and systematic way of seeking answers to the research questions. In other words, it is the overall plan for a study that provides a coherent and logical framework for collecting data to address the research problem. That

is to say, the design comprises the blueprint for the collection, measurement, analysis of data, and the timeframe.

Under “Research design”, the researcher needs to state: (i). The subdiscipline within which the research falls (eg. anthropology of religion, Jewish studies, systematic theology, biblical studies, practical theology, missiology, etc.), (ii). The nature of research (empirical or non-empirical/literary), and (iii). The kind of data collection technique (eg. a survey or cross-sectional, case study, etc), if applicable, and justify their choices.<sup>49</sup>

Whilst the above is enough for some institutions, for others it is required to also provide an outline of the methodological model (eg. Gardener-Theologian approach, Osmer’s model, Praxis matrix methodology, etc).<sup>50</sup> My experience with some institutions shows that most theology and religious studies research works are conducted without following such methodological models mentioned above. The students are only required to focus on (i)—(iii). My advice is that students should discuss with their supervisors what their institutions require.

At this point, I need to outline briefly the concepts of empirical and non-empirical research. Empirical research is one based on direct or indirect observed and measured phenomena. That is, empirical research refers to scientific inquiry that relies on direct observation or experimentation to gather and analyse data. It involves fieldwork and derives knowledge from actual experience rather than from theory.

Non-empirical (literary) research, on the other hand, has to do with scholarly inquiry that does not rely on direct observation or experimentation to generate knowledge. Instead, non-empirical research draws on existing literature, theories and concepts to explore ideas, develop arguments, or generate new insights.

Let me use theological studies as an example. Generally speaking research in areas like Biblical studies and systematic

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<sup>49</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 31.

<sup>50</sup> For more on these methodologies and others consult Boaheng, *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies*.

theology usually falls under literary research whilst those in practical theology, missiology and church & society involve an empirical component. My general advice is that even if theological research has an empirical component, one should indicate the methodological model. As one goes through the steps in the methodological model used one then indicates the “procedure”<sup>51</sup> involved in the data collection. This is done under the step which requires field work (empirical study).

### ***Research Methodology***

Research methodology refers to the detailed approach or framework used to conduct research, solve problems, or accomplish tasks in a particular field or discipline. It has to do with the principles, theories, and guidelines that guide the process from start to finish. Methodology outlines the systematic way of approaching a problem or study, providing a roadmap for achieving goals.

Research methodology is directly linked to research design. The design deals with a broad overview of the steps required to solve the research problem. The methodology takes it up from there and gives a description of the steps, methods, and procedures the researcher intends to take in solving the research problem. The design is the overall plan or structure guiding the research whilst the methodology is a detailed explanation of the broader framework or theoretical perspective informing the research process. For traditional social science research, the methodology usually consists of the research design,<sup>52</sup> population and sample, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and sometimes measurements of variables.

In this case, the design specifies the area study, the nature of the research, and whether the study is a questionnaire-based or a laboratory experiment, or any other method. The “population and

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<sup>51</sup> I have used the term “procedure” here to denote population and sample, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures as they relate to empirical studies.

<sup>52</sup> Whilst the design may be separated from the methodology, some institutions place the design under the methodology.

sampling” subsection identifies who will participate in the study and explains the sampling procedure to be used. Under the “data collection” subsection, one provides details about the measuring instruments to be used, justifies the choice of instruments and discusses the validity and reliability of these instruments. Then one writes under the “procedure” subsection how they plan to conduct the research, the activities involved and the specific duration of the study. The design concludes with how the data will be presented, analysed/interpreted.

Thus, the researcher uses the methodology section to: (i). Explain how they hope to achieve the research aims, (ii). Outline a procedure which (if necessary) can be repeated by others, and (iii). Indicate the sources of data that will be used. This means the researcher must show how they are going to investigate the research problem. For each step, the researcher needs to explain exactly how they intend to go about it. The researcher must also discuss the data needed and the suitable tools involved in data collection.

Tools or methods (in this context) are instruments, software, equipment, or resources used to collect data. In other words, they are specific techniques or procedures used within a methodology to gather data, analyse information, or accomplish tasks.<sup>53</sup> They are the practical steps or actions taken to implement the broader methodology. Methods can vary widely depending on the goals, context, and nature of the project or research. They are the components that aid in the implementation of the methodology’s steps.

A data collection tool should be reliable,<sup>54</sup> meaning it should consistently produce consistent results when applied repeatedly to the same individuals under identical circumstances. For instance, if an individual provides certain responses to questionnaire items during one administration, they should provide similar responses when the same questionnaire is administered to them again on a

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<sup>53</sup> Zina O’Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Research* (London: Sage Publication, 2004), 85.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research* 158.

subsequent occasion. The researcher should justify why they are using a particular tool or set of tools.

The choice of research tools depends on the specific research objectives, methods, and requirements of the study. The methods and procedures to be used differ according to the nature of the researcher's field of study. For instance, in social science research, tools/methods may include surveys, interviews, experiments, or observations, depending on the research question and objectives. However, in Biblical studies, tools can range from physical "devices" like Bible Concordance, Lexicons, Commentaries, Encyclopedias and Dictionaries to software applications like eSword, Logos Bible Software, Accordance Bible Software, and Olive Tree Bible Study. For research projects in social science, the tools may include interviews, questionnaires, and observations, among others. In the case of a purely literature-based study, the methodology must include the sources the researcher intends to consult as well as how they intend to engage with these sources.

### **Limitations and Delimitations (Scope of the Research)**

Limitations and delimitations are important considerations in research as they help to define the scope and boundaries of a study. The limitations and delimitations define the scope of the research, which denotes the boundaries and parameters that define the extent of the study.

Limitations refer to factors that may restrict the extent of the study or influence its outcomes. These can include constraints such as time,<sup>55</sup> resources, sample size, access to data, instrument and methodological limitations. For example, the researcher may be limited by the instrument used to read their observation to the first decimal place even though they may wish to read to the second or third decimal place for the sake of accuracy. Taking readings to one decimal place therefore becomes a limitation in experiments

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<sup>55</sup> Note that time and resource limitations are common to virtually every research. Therefore, many institutions do not accept these as valid limitations.

conducted using such instruments. In addition, a study with a small sample size may have limited generalisability to a larger population. Researchers need to acknowledge and discuss limitations openly to provide transparency and context for their findings.

Delimitations, on the other hand, refer to self-imposed boundaries or limits that the researcher intentionally sets to narrow the focus of the study. They are choices made by the researcher which put some restrictions on the scope of the research. These may include specific populations, geographical locations, periods, variables, or theoretical frameworks. Delimitations help to clarify the scope of the study and define what is included and excluded from consideration. For example, a study on the effects of a new teaching method may delimit the sample to students in a particular grade level or subject area, or a study on historical events may delimit the time to a specific era or event. The researcher is expected to justify why they choose to delimit their study the way they do it. Defining the scope of the research helps the researcher to focus on the precise issue they intend to consider.

Other examples, specifically tailored towards theological and religious studies can be noted as follows. The first is canonical, which occurs when the researcher chooses to focus on a particular part of Scripture. A research on “The doctrine of Salvation in Genesis” is restricted to Genesis alone. The second is geographical, where the researcher limits their research to a particular region (or regions). One of the delimitations of work on the topic “Decreasing Trends in Church Membership of the Methodist Church Ghana: The Sunyani Diocese in Perspective” may be that the study will be limited to Methodist Societies in the Sunyani diocese. The third is ethnography, where a researcher limits their research to a particular cultural or ethnic group. A research on “Puberty rites among the Bono” has a delimitation of focusing only on the Bono people. Fourth is historical, where a study is limited to a particular period. A research on the topic, “The impact of Christianity in the 19th century” is limited to the period 1800-1899. Fifth is ecclesiastical, where a research is focused on certain churches or denominations rather than

all. For example, a research on “The administration of the Lord’s Supper among Pentecostals” does not cover historic mainline churches. Sixth is conceptual, where a research is limited to certain conceptual elements. For example, a research on the doctrine of God may be limited to only God’s sovereignty. By so doing the other conceptual elements are excluded.

## **Literature Review**

Chris Hart defines literature review as the process of choosing from a range of documents (both published and unpublished) pertaining to the topic and evaluating these documents to determine their significance to the proposed research.<sup>56</sup> A literature review is an account of previous works undertaken by accredited scholars and researchers on a particular topic. In the review of literature, the researcher must provide information about what was done, how it was done (what method(s) were used), and what results were generated in relation to the subject under study as well as what suggestions were made for further research.

The literature review is based on the assumption that knowledge accumulates and that we learn from, and build on, what others have done. It is built from secondary sources such as edited books, journal articles, monographs, databases, dissertations/theses, newspapers, conference proceedings, empirical studies, government reports, historical records, statistical handbooks, and policy guides. It includes the current knowledge including substantive findings, as well as theoretical and methodological contributions to a particular topic.

The section of the literature review demonstrates the researcher’s engagement with relevant sources related to your topic. It illustrates the evolution of the researcher’s initial thoughts and helps to formulate the research problem. It helps the researcher to identify gaps and add to what has been done. It also helps the

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<sup>56</sup> Chris Hart, *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 1998), 13.

researcher to avoid pitfalls in the previous approaches. It helps the researcher to avoid duplicating existing studies. By noting the previous attempts by other scholars, the researcher is guarded against duplication of effort. The literature review also provides a comprehensive understanding of the problems at hand, the methodologies employed to address them, potential solutions, any emerging challenges from these solutions, and their effectiveness.<sup>57</sup> To sum up its relevance, literature review assesses the current state of knowledge on a topic, identifies gaps in the existing research and guides future research directions.

The literature review must not be taken as an annotated bibliography in which you summarise briefly each book/article that you have reviewed. Even though the literature review contains what the researcher has read on the subject, it normally goes well beyond merely summarising this literature. The researcher should identify and explain the strengths and weaknesses/limitations of the approaches to the study. The review is expected to describe the relationship among different works and to locate the current study within the context of existing literature. One of the most useful aspects of the literature review is that it helps the researcher to develop a good conceptual/theoretical framework for their own study.

### **Approaches to Literature Review**

Literature review may be approached from different perspectives, a few of which are outlined briefly below.

#### ***Narrative/Traditional Review***

A narrative review (sometimes referred to as a non-systematic review/overview) is a comprehensive synthesis of previously published information. This type of literature review condenses the author's findings into a concise format, summarising the content of

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<sup>57</sup> Mouton, *How to Succeed in your Masters and Doctoral Studies*, 50-51.

each referenced article.<sup>58</sup> Its main goal is to provide readers with a thorough background for understanding existing knowledge while highlighting the importance of new research.<sup>59</sup> It can also spark research ideas by identifying gaps or inconsistencies in the current body of knowledge, and thus help researchers determine or define their research questions or hypotheses.<sup>60</sup>

While some researchers suggest critiquing each study included, it is ultimately up to the author to decide. This approach allows for a more flexible exploration of the topic, often incorporating a range of sources such as books, articles, and other scholarly works. A narrative overview has some notable advantages. For example, it serves as valuable educational resources that consolidate diverse information into an easily readable format. It also provides a broad perspective on a topic, often explaining its historical context or development.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Systematic Review***

Systematic review involves a carefully structured process that includes systematically selecting relevant studies, thoroughly extracting data, and critically synthesising the findings. Unlike traditional reviews, which aim to summarise the results of several studies, systematic reviews strive to compile a comprehensive list of all published and unpublished studies related to a specific subject area.<sup>62</sup>

According to Parahoo a systematic review should clearly state the time frame within which the literature was selected and the

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<sup>58</sup> Bart N. Green, Claire D. Johnson and Alan Adams, "Writing narrative literature reviews for peer-reviewed journals: secrets of the trade," *Journal of Chiropractic Medicine* 5(3) (2006): 101-117, 103.

<sup>59</sup> Patricia Cronin, Frances Ryan, and Michael Coughlan, "Undertaking a literature review: a step-by-step approach," *British Journal of Nursing* 17(1) (2008): 38-43, 38.

<sup>60</sup> Cronin, Ryan, and Coughlan, "Undertaking a literature review: a step-by-step approach," 38.

<sup>61</sup> Green, Johnson and Adams, "Writing narrative literature reviews for peer-reviewed journals: secrets of the trade," 103.

<sup>62</sup> Cronin, Ryan, and Coughlan, "Undertaking a literature review: a step-by-step approach," 39.

methods used to evaluate and synthesise the findings of the studies in question.<sup>63</sup> To enable the reader to assess the review's reliability and validity, the reviewer must present the precise criteria used to: (i). Formulate the research question; (ii). Establish inclusion or exclusion criteria; (iii). Select and access the literature; (iv). Assess the quality of the literature included in the review; and (v). Analyse, synthesise, and disseminate the findings.<sup>64</sup> This approach is, therefore, noted for its methodological rigour. It aims to minimise bias and subjectivity; this makes systematic reviews highly reliable and objective. Systematic reviews are regarded as the gold standard for evidence-based research. They offer a clear and rigorous assessment of the available evidence on a specific research question.

### ***Integrated Review***

Integrated review, which involves synthesising and analysing existing literature on a particular topic to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge. Unlike traditional literature reviews that may focus on summarising individual studies, an integrated research review seeks to integrate findings from multiple sources to identify patterns, themes, contradictions (opposing views), and gaps in the literature. This approach allows researchers to develop a deeper understanding of the topic by considering a variety of perspectives and evidence. In short, in an integrated review, the researcher examines previous works in a particular area of interest and identifies the relationship among the works being examined.

### ***Theoretical Review***

Another approach is the theoretical review, which involves examining and analysing existing theories, models, frameworks, and

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<sup>63</sup> As cited in Cronin, Ryan, and Coughlan, "Undertaking a literature review: a step-by-step approach," 39.

<sup>64</sup> Cronin, Ryan, and Coughlan, "Undertaking a literature review: a step-by-step approach," 39.

concepts relevant to a particular topic or research question.<sup>65</sup> The focus here is the theoretical underpinnings and conceptual foundations of a subject area. This helps the researcher to establish what theories already exist, the relationships between them, and to what degree the existing theories have been investigated. By so doing, the researcher is enlightened to develop new hypotheses to be tested.

### ***Thematic Review***

Literature review may also be thematic. A thematic review involves identifying, analysing, and synthesising key themes or patterns across existing literature related to a particular research topic or question.<sup>66</sup> Here, the researcher seeks to explore broader themes, concepts, and ideas that emerge from the literature.

### ***Historical Review***

A literature review may also be conducted using a historical or chronological approach. This entails scrutinising research across a time continuum, typically starting with the first appearance of an issue, concept, theory, or phenomenon in scholarly discourse, and subsequently tracing its development within the academic canon of a particular discipline.<sup>67</sup> The objective is to contextualise research within a historical framework, demonstrating acquaintance with contemporary advancements and discerning potential avenues for future inquiry. That is to say, this type of review seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the historical context, developments, interpretations, and debates surrounding the topic of interest.

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<sup>65</sup> A. J. Onwuegbuzie and R. Frels, *Seven Steps to a Comprehensive Literature Review* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2015), 24-25; see also “Four Ways To Structure Your Literature Review” <https://dissertationbydesign.com/four-ways-to-structure-your-literature-review/>

<sup>66</sup> “Four Ways To Structure Your Literature Review” <https://dissertationbydesign.com/four-ways-to-structure-your-literature-review/>

<sup>67</sup> Onwuegbuzie and Frels, *Seven Steps to a Comprehensive Literature Review*, 25; see also “Four Ways To Structure Your Literature Review” <https://dissertationbydesign.com/four-ways-to-structure-your-literature-review/>

### ***Methodological Review***

Another approach to the review of literature is the methodological model. This kind of literature review involves examining and evaluating research methodologies, approaches, techniques, and procedures relevant to a particular field of study.<sup>68</sup> With this approach, researchers draw upon a diverse array of knowledge, spanning from theoretical concepts to practical fieldwork documents, to navigate ontological and epistemological considerations, integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches, address sampling issues, conduct interviews, and analyse data. This type of review aims to provide insight into the various methodological frameworks, tools, and practices that researchers employ to conduct empirical investigations and generate new knowledge.

One has to decide which approach is appropriate for their work. When determining the structure of a literature review, several critical factors come into play. Firstly, the purpose of the review needs to be clarified. Is it intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the field or to critically evaluate specific theories or research methodologies? Secondly, considering the audience is essential. Will the review be read by experts in the field or a more general audience? Thirdly, the scope of the review also helps to decide which approach to use. This includes decisions about the time frame covered by sources, the types of sources to include, and whether the focus will be on a particular research method or theory. Lastly, the available resources must be taken into account, including which sources will be accessed and whether evaluations of source quality will be conducted.

Students make several mistakes in their reviews. I outline some of these mistakes in the following section.

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<sup>68</sup> Onwuegbuzie and Frels, *Seven Steps to a Comprehensive Literature Review*, 25; see also “Four Ways To Structure Your Literature Review” <https://dissertationbydesign.com/four-ways-to-structure-your-literature-review/>

## Common Problems in Literature Reviews

The following are some of the common problems/weaknesses of literature review.

- i. **Poor organisation and structure:** When a literature review is not well-organised, it can be difficult for readers to follow the argument or see how different sources relate to each other and the overall topic. A clear structure is essential for clarity and flow.
- ii. **Lack of focus and coherence:** A literature review should have a clear focus and logical progression. Without this, it can become a collection of unrelated summaries rather than a cohesive analysis. Unfortunately, many students fail to give their work a clear focus and logical progression.
- iii. **Repetitiveness and verbosity:** Repeating the same information or using more words than necessary can make a literature review tedious and difficult to read. Concise and precise writing is more effective. I sometimes find reviews repetitive and verbose.
- iv. **Failure to cite key influential sources:** This is a common weakness. Omitting important studies or seminal works can undermine the credibility of the review and leave significant gaps in the analysis.
- v. **Subjectivity and biases:** A literature review should be objective and impartial. Allowing personal biases to influence the selection or interpretation of sources can skew the review and reduce its reliability. I have observed this on a few occasions in works submitted to me.
- vi. **Not staying updated with recent developments:** Research fields evolve, and new studies can provide crucial insights. Failing to include the latest research can make a review outdated and incomplete. Yet, many students do not pay attention to this.
- vii. **Lack of critical evaluation of cited sources:** This means simply summarising sources without critically assessing their methodology, findings, and relevance. This practice can

weaken the review. Critical evaluation is necessary to understand the strengths and limitations of existing research. Students must avoid this mistake.

- viii. **Citing irrelevant or minor sources:** This means including sources that do not significantly contribute to the topic. Doing this can distract from the main argument and dilute the impact of the review. Students should cite relevant sources.
- ix. **Over-reliance on secondary sources:** This is also a common weakness. While secondary sources can be useful, relying too heavily on them instead of primary research can result in a lack of original analysis and critical depth. Primary sources provide the most direct evidence and should be prioritised.
- x. **Overgeneralisation:** This means drawing broad conclusions or making sweeping generalisations<sup>69</sup> based on a limited number of studies or a narrow scope of analysis. Such practice can lead to inaccuracies and misrepresentations of the research findings. This is not only seen in the literature review. It also comes up in other chapters, especially the analysis, formulation and interpretation sections.

### **Organisation of the Study**

This section provides a summary of the content covered in each chapter, presented concisely and logically. It is crucial to ensure the appropriate arrangement of chapters. Avoid including findings, results, or conclusions of the various chapters or of the entire thesis in this section. Simply give a forecast of each of the chapters in the project. Each chapter may be devoted to a key aspect(s) of the research problem/question.

The example below shows the organisation of work for literature-based research on the Matthean Beatitudes.

Chapter 1: General Introduction

Chapter 2: Background and Context of the Beatitudes

Chapter 3: Exploring the Message of the Matthean Beatitudes

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<sup>69</sup> I have explained this further in section 7.7.

Chapter 4: Implications of the Message of the Beatitudes for Discipleship

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

To put flesh on this, the researcher wrote under “Organisation of the Study” as follows:

This study is organised in five (5) chapters as follows. The first chapter deals with the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, research questions, the scope of the study, methodology and limitations. The second chapter looks at the historical-cultural background as well as the literary context of the text, whilst the third chapter employs the exegetical method to explore the meaning of the Beatitudes. The fourth chapter draws lessons from the Beatitudes for contemporary discipleship. Finally, the fifth chapter provides the summary and conclusion of the entire study, and recommendations both for future researchers and for the church.<sup>70</sup>

A typical outline for empirical social science research may be as follows:

Chapter 1: General Introduction

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework/ Literature Review

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Analysis

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

### **Definition of Terms**

This part of the proposal defines all terms that are pivotal to the understanding of the study. These include uncommon technical terms, that is, terms with more than one attested meaning in scholarly literature and terms the researcher is using with slightly different connotations from its standard use in scholarly literature. There is no limit to the number of terms to define. Smith, however, prescribes “as many as necessary, but as few as possible.”<sup>71</sup> In some cases, there

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<sup>70</sup> Boaheng, *The Matthean Beatitudes*, 5-6. This may be expanded a bit to give a better overview.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 145.

may be no need to define any term. In the course of the work, less pivotal terms that are introduced can be defined as and when they first occur in the work. Do not just define terms; define only relevant terms.

### **Ethical Issues**

To undertake the research ethically, certain considerations must be taken. Most institutions require rigorous ethical clearance before the research can begin, especially if human participants are involved in the research. In this section, the researcher needs to state what ethical considerations will be involved. The first three (i-iii) in the following example apply to research work involving human participants.<sup>72</sup> The last one applies to any kind of research.

- i. No persons will<sup>73</sup> be forced to participate against their will.
- ii. The names and inputs of participants will be kept confidential.
- iii. All participants will be protected from any physical, emotional, and spiritual discomfort by the researcher ensuring that their responses remain confidential and unanimous.
- iv. All sources will be acknowledged in this study.

### **References/Bibliography**

The research proposal must have a reference list or bibliography written in accordance with standard academic writing procedures. The bibliography should be a short list of the key relevant literature in the area and must be presented in alphabetic order. Some institutions require presenting the entry according to classification such as manuscripts, books, journals, commission reports, newspapers, etc. The bibliography needs not be extensive at this stage, but it should indicate the texts that are important and relevant to your project. It includes not only works cited in the proposal but also those that the researcher knows will be useful for the project.

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<sup>72</sup> More will be said about this in chapter four.

<sup>73</sup> I have used the future tense because it is in a proposal. It has to be revised into the past tense when the work is completed.

The kind of material consulted is very crucial in any academic research. Care must, therefore, be taken to ensure that the “right” (appropriate/relevant) materials are consulted. I offer three guidelines. Firstly, do not consult outdated works. I recommend that most of the works consulted should be from the last 15 years.<sup>74</sup> Works that were published more than 25 years ago may be consulted only when they are seminal works in the field. C.G. Baeta’s *Prophetism in Ghana* was published in 1962 but may be consulted in many current research works in Pentecostal Studies because it is a classic work.

Secondly, in addition to general works, consult as many monographs as possible. A commentary on the New Testament will not treat Paul’s view on justification in Romans 3 as much as an article of Romans 3 will do.

Thirdly, consult academic resources rather than popular and devotional ones. Devotional books are designed to inspire and enhance personal spiritual growth through passages from religious texts, meditations, prayers, and reflections. They are typically used for daily reading and personal spiritual development.

Devotional or popular books are not good to consult for academic work, at least for the following reasons.

- i. Devotional books are subjective and focus on personal interpretations and experiences of faith, lacking the objectivity and critical analysis required for academic work.
- ii. These books do not adhere to the rigorous standards of academic research, such as peer review and extensive referencing.
- iii. The primary aim of devotional books is personal reflection and spiritual growth. They are not meant to contribute to academic knowledge or debate, which requires analytical thinking and critical evaluation.
- iv. Devotional books often lack comprehensive citations and references, which are essential for academic credibility and

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<sup>74</sup> Students need to consult with their supervisors to know what their institution requires.

verification of information. What I mean is that since there are normally no citations in devotional works it is impossible to verify the credibility of information that might have come from outside (sources).

- v. The intended audience for devotional books is individuals seeking spiritual guidance, not scholars or researchers. Academic work is meant for those who expect thorough research and detailed analysis.

The bibliography should not be an annotated bibliography unless otherwise stated. However, it is important to consider how it is prepared to equip the reader when required to prepare one. The next section focuses on this.

### ***Annotated Bibliography***

An annotated bibliography is a detailed list of references that includes a summary and evaluation of each cited source. Each entry in an annotated bibliography consists of two parts: the citation and the annotation.

- i. **Citation:** This part provides the standard bibliographic information for the source, such as the author, title, publication date, and publisher, formatted according to a specific citation style (e.g., Modern Language Association [MLA], American Psychological Association [APA], or Chicago).
- ii. **Annotation:** This is a brief paragraph that follows the citation and includes:
  - **Summary:** A concise summary of the source's main arguments, findings, or content.
  - **Evaluation:** A critical assessment of the source's credibility, relevance, accuracy, and contribution to the field.
  - **Reflection:** An explanation of how the source fits into your research, its usefulness for your study, and any insights or ideas it provides.

The purpose of an annotated bibliography is to give readers a comprehensive overview of the available research on a topic, including the quality and relevance of each source. It helps researchers organise their sources, identify key literature in their field, and demonstrate their understanding of the research landscape. It can also guide readers in their own research by highlighting the most valuable and credible sources on a given topic.

### **Timetable/Work Plan for the Research**

The timetable for the research refers to a schedule of activities from the start to the completion of research. Thus, it is the schedule and milestones for completing the proposed research project. The timetable/work plan section in a research proposal serves several critical purposes. Firstly, it provides clarity and accountability by outlining the project's timeline and responsibilities, ensuring that all involved parties understand their roles and deadlines. Secondly, it conducts a feasibility assessment, evaluating whether the research can realistically be completed within the proposed timeframe, taking into account the project's scope and complexity. Additionally, it functions as a tool for project management, facilitating progress tracking, identifying potential delays, and allowing for necessary adjustments to be made as the project unfolds. Lastly, it supports evaluation and monitoring efforts by funders, supervisors, or reviewers. It enables them to assess whether the project is advancing according to plan and meeting its objectives effectively.

The timetable must be realistic, allocating sufficient time for various activities and also for revising, editing and producing the final text. An example is shown below.

<b>Period</b>		<b>Activity</b>
18/11/2024	to	Proposal and Chapter One
18/12/2024		
19/12/2024	to	Draft of Chapter Two
29/1/2025		Literature review

1/2/2025 to 28/2/2025	Draft of Chapter Three Gathering of primary data Interviews and focus group discussions
1/3/2025 to 31/3/2025	Draft of Chapter Four Engagement with data Recommendations Conclusion
1/4/2025 to 30/4/2025	Correction of draft thesis printing, binding and submission

*Table 2.1: Sample Research Timetable/Work Plan*

## 2.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks are indispensable elements in research. They are typically situated within the chapter dedicated to the literature review, where the theoretical/conceptual perspectives of the primary variables or constructs are thoroughly examined. The framework is commonly found in the second section (chapter two) of the dissertation/thesis. They offer direction and organisation to the study. In this section, I explain these two concepts.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Disciplines such as religion present a highly intricate phenomenon, making the study of it potentially bewildering without proper guidance and organisational tools. Academic researchers lean on theories—collections of ideas that offer explanations—as a means to approach, comprehend, and digest information concerning one or multiple religions. This is what is referred to as **a theoretical framework**.

A theoretical framework is a set of interconnected theories, and propositions that provide the foundation for understanding and interpreting the findings of a research study.<sup>75</sup> Examples of

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<sup>75</sup> Dickson Adom, Emad Kamil Hussein and Joe Adu Agyem, “Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: Mandatory Ingredients of a Quality Research,” *International Journal of Scientific Research* 7(1) (2018): 438-441, 438.

theoretical frameworks include: Psychoanalytic Theory, Feminist Theory, Conflict Theory and Functionalism. Every aspect of the study must connect with the theoretical framework. The relevance of the theoretical framework is not far-fetched. Firstly, it guides the research design, data analysis, and the selection of data.<sup>76</sup> Secondly, it enhances the credibility and generalisability of findings, guides literature review and scholarly discourse, and encourages critical thinking.<sup>77</sup> Thirdly, it helps the researcher to define their study philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically.<sup>78</sup>

The theoretical framework needs to be chosen carefully. Some of the factors (and/or principles) to consider in choosing a framework for research are as follows:<sup>79</sup>

1. One must consider the discipline to which the theory will be applied
2. It is important to assess whether the theory aligns with the methodology planned for the study.
3. The selected theory should be well-developed with many theoretical constructs.
4. Specific theoretical principles should be chosen to meet the objectives of the study.
5. The problem statement, research purpose, and importance of the study should correlate with the selected theoretical framework.
6. The theory should be capable of being used hand in hand with the research questions.
7. The theoretical framework should inform the literature review, guiding the selection and analysis of relevant literature.

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<sup>76</sup> Adom, Hussein and Agyem, "Theoretical and Conceptual Framework," 438.

<sup>77</sup> Adom, Hussein and Agyem, "Theoretical and Conceptual Framework," 438.

<sup>78</sup> Adom, Hussein and Agyem, "Theoretical and Conceptual Framework," 438.

<sup>79</sup> Adapted from Adom, Hussein and Agyem, "Theoretical and Conceptual Framework," 439.

8. The data analysis plan should align with the selected theoretical framework to facilitate the interpretation and synthesis of research findings.
9. The theoretical framework should undergird the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the data analysis, ensuring logical coherence and relevance in the study's outcomes.

### ***Conceptual Framework***

The conceptual framework of a study comprises a network of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that underpin and guide your research.<sup>80</sup> It is basically “a conception or model of what is out there that you plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why; a tentative theory of the phenomena that one is interested in investigating.”<sup>81</sup>

The relevance of a conceptual framework in research can be noted and outlined.<sup>82</sup> Firstly, it aids the researcher in shaping their worldview regarding the phenomenon under investigation and assists in the identification and construction of foundational perspectives. Secondly, it serves as a means for the researcher to articulate proposed solutions to the identified problem, and to present them clearly and concisely. Thirdly, it highlights the rationale behind the choice of the research topic, the researcher's assumptions, and their alignment or disagreement with existing scholarly discourse. Thus, it presents a conceptual grounding for the study approach.

### ***Differences Between Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks***

The conceptual framework differs from the theoretical framework in some respects. I present a few of these below.

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<sup>80</sup> Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Integrative Approach* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE publications Ltd., 2013), 39.

<sup>81</sup> Ewnetu H. Tamene, “Theorising Conceptual Framework,” *Asian Journal of Educational Research* 4(2) (2016): 50-56, 51.

<sup>82</sup> Gleaned from Adom, Hussein and Agyem, “Theoretical and Conceptual Framework,” 439.

1. A conceptual framework outlines key concepts and theories relevant to a research study, whilst a theoretical framework integrates established theories that guide the research process and the interpretation of data.
2. A conceptual framework is built on concepts (which serve as the primary variables in a study) whilst a theoretical framework is built upon existing theories in the literature, which have undergone testing and validation by other scholars.<sup>83</sup>
3. The focus of a conceptual framework is to elucidate interrelationships and underlying reasons within the phenomena under study, whereas a theoretical framework integrates theories to provide a theoretical basis for the research.
4. Conceptual frameworks are often developed by researchers based on their understanding and literature review, whilst theoretical frameworks are drawn from established theories relevant to the research problem.
5. A conceptual framework comprises interconnected concepts (illustrating the relationships between them and how the researcher intends to address the defined research problem) whereas a theoretical framework comprises interconnected theories (with deduced propositions reflecting their interrelated nature).<sup>84</sup>

## 2.5 Common Mistakes in Research Proposal Writing

This section highlights the inherent challenges and potential pitfalls that researchers may encounter while crafting research proposals. It emphasises the importance of meticulous attention to detail at every stage of proposal development.

- i. **Lack of context:** Failing to properly frame the research question.

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<sup>83</sup> Adom, Hussein and Agyem, "Theoretical and Conceptual Framework," 440.

<sup>84</sup> Adom, Hussein and Agyem, "Theoretical and Conceptual Framework," 440.

- ii. **Undefined boundaries:** Not clearly delimiting the scope of your research.
- iii. **Omitting landmark studies:** Not citing key influential studies.
- iv. **Misrepresenting contributions:** Inaccurately presenting others' theoretical and empirical work.
- v. **Lack of focus:** Not staying centred on the research question.
- vi. **Weak argument:** Failing to develop a coherent and persuasive case for your research.
- vii. **Imbalance in detail:** Providing too much detail on minor issues and not enough on major ones.
- viii. **Rambling:** Lacking clear direction, resulting in a proposal that feels scattered. (Effective proposals are smooth and coherent, like a seamless river.)
- ix. **Citation errors:** Making too many citation mistakes and incorrect references.
- x. **Improper length:** Being too long or too short.
- xi. **Poor writing quality:** Sloppy writing and overgeneralisation.

## 2.6 Criteria for Examining Research Proposal

Different supervisors and examiners look out for different things when judging the quality of a research proposal. However, in general, the following questions are usually considered in examining proposals:<sup>85</sup>

- i. Does the researcher have a clear idea of what [they] plan to research? Examiners check whether the researcher has a well-defined and specific research topic or question that they plan to investigate. They assess the clarity and coherence of the research focus.
- ii. Does the proposal have a focus? Examiners evaluate whether the proposal has a central theme or focus and whether the

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<sup>85</sup> University of the Western Cape, “Research Proposal Guide: Developing and submitting a research proposal” n.d. (Accessed from: file/appdata/local/temp/research\_proposal-1.pdf on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2020)

- research aims and objectives are clearly articulated and aligned with the research idea.
- iii. Is the topic worthy of academic study and significance? Examiners want to know if the proposed topic is academically significant and contributes to existing knowledge in the field. They assess the relevance and importance of the research topic.
  - iv. Does the researcher demonstrate an adequate understanding of the debates in the literature on this topic? Is the project feasible? Examiners want the researcher to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the existing literature and debates related to the research topic. They evaluate the researcher's ability to situate their research within the broader scholarly context.
  - v. Does the researcher have a realistic idea of how [they are] going to tackle the investigation? Examiners find out whether the proposed research project is feasible in terms of resources, time, and methodology. They assess the practicality and viability of the research plan.
  - vi. Is it doable within the time constraints? Examiners consider whether the researcher has a realistic plan for conducting the investigation within the specified time frame. They evaluate the researcher's time management and project planning skills.
  - vii. Does the bibliography and referencing conform to accepted conventions? Is it technically faultless? Examiners find out whether the bibliography and referencing in the proposal adhere to accepted academic conventions and are technically correct. They assess the accuracy and completeness of the citations and references provided.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has given a brief discussion of what the planning and writing of a research proposal entails. Discussions on the various aspects of the proposal will help researchers come out with acceptable proposals that will help produce focused and well-written

research papers. With this as a background, I now proceed to the next chapter where I consider the structure of a research paper.

## 2.8 Review Exercise

1. Define the following terms:
  - a. Research questions
  - b. Research hypothesis
2. Why is a research proposal important?
3. Explain the theoretical framework, giving examples.
4. What is a conceptual framework? How does it differ from the theoretical framework?
5. Why do you consider the use of hypothesis relevant in a research work?
6. What are the reasons for conducting a literature review at the start of a research project?
7. Differentiate between a research question and a hypothesis.
8. How does the research method differ from the research design?
9. Explain how you will conduct your literature review and explain why you will use that approach.
10. How is a research problem formulated?
11. Is justification the same as motivation of the research? Explain your answer.
12. How does real life problem differ from a research problem? Give examples to illustrate your answer.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EMPIRICAL RESEARCH APPROACHES

Empirical research approaches are essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of real-world phenomena through systematic observation, measurement, and data collection. This chapter explores various empirical methodologies, highlighting their application, strengths, and limitations in the context of the current study. Selected quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches are highlighted. The chapter also outlines the specific empirical strategies utilised, the rationale behind their selection, and the procedures followed to ensure rigorous and reliable data collection and analysis.

#### 3.1 Quantitative Method

Quantitative research is a systematic approach to studying social phenomena that relies on the collection and analysis of numerical data.<sup>86</sup> This method employs structured surveys, experiments, or observations to gather data that can be quantified and statistically analysed. In quantitative study, the researcher often uses statistical techniques to identify patterns, relationships, and trends within a population. The primary aim of quantitative research is to test hypotheses, make generalisations about populations, and measure the strength and direction of relationships between variables. In terms of analysis, the quantitative method usually employs statistical analysis, for description, for comparing groups and for relating variables.

#### Strengths of Quantitative Research

1. Quantitative research aims for objectivity, utilising standardised measures and statistical analyses to ensure

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<sup>86</sup> Enas A. A. Abuhamda, Islam Asim Ismail and Tahani R. K. Bsharat, "Understanding Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods: A Theoretical Perspective for Young Researchers," *International Journal of Research* 8(2) (2021): 71-87, 72.

- replicability of findings.<sup>87</sup> This enhances the reliability of results and allows for comparison across studies.
2. Quantitative research often uses large, representative samples and this allows findings to be generalised to broader populations with greater confidence.<sup>88</sup> This enhances the external validity of the research.
  3. Quantitative methods enable precise measurement of variables and the calculation of statistical relationships, providing quantitative estimates of the strength and direction of associations between variables.
  4. Quantitative data collection methods, such as surveys or experiments, can be efficient in terms of time and resources, particularly when collecting data from large samples or when standardised measures are used.
  5. Quantitative data are numerical and can be easily analysed using statistical techniques, thus, allowing for the quantification of relationships and patterns within the data.<sup>89</sup>
  6. Quantitative data is anonymous, especially with sensitive topics through self-completion exercises like online surveys.

### **Weaknesses of Quantitative Research**

1. By focusing primarily on numerical data and statistical patterns rather than the qualitative aspects of phenomena, quantitative research may provide limited insight into the underlying reasons or meanings behind observed relationships.<sup>90</sup>
2. Quantitative research may oversimplify complex phenomena by reducing them to quantifiable variables, potentially

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<sup>87</sup> Eyisi Daniel, "The Usefulness of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Researching Problem-Solving Ability in Science Education Curriculum," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7(15) (2016): 91-100, 94.

<sup>88</sup> Daniel, "The Usefulness of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods," 94.

<sup>89</sup> Daniel, "The Usefulness of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods," 94.

<sup>90</sup> Daniel, "The Usefulness of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods," 94.

overlooking important contextual factors or individual experiences.

3. Quantitative research designs may lack flexibility compared to qualitative approaches, as they often require predefined variables and measures. This limits the researcher's ability to explore unexpected findings or adapt the research process.<sup>91</sup>
4. Quantitative research relies on standardised measures, which may introduce measurement error or bias if the instruments are not properly validated or if participants provide inaccurate responses.
5. Since the respondents respond to the researchers outside their typical environment, they may provide responses that do not truly reflect their real-life behaviour.
6. After the survey is completed, it is impossible to follow up on participant responses due to the anonymity maintained. This lack of direct engagement can challenge the validity of findings, particularly if results are inconclusive. Whilst offering a follow-up survey is an option, not all participants may opt to participate; this fact further limits the researcher's ability to clarify responses.

### **3.2 Qualitative Method**

Qualitative research is research that is based on collecting and analysing non-numerical data, such as words, images, sounds, or actions.<sup>92</sup> Instead of quantifying data (as is the case in quantitative research), qualitative researchers use appropriate method(s) to decipher the meanings and contexts embedded within non-numerical data. These methods generally fall into three categories: observation, interviews, and document analysis. Observation entails observing and documenting individuals' actions and words in authentic or controlled environments. Interviews entail posing open-ended

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<sup>91</sup> Daniel, "The Usefulness of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods," 94.

<sup>92</sup> Abuhamda, Ismail and Bsharat, "Understanding Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods," 72; Daniel, "The Usefulness of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods," 92.

questions and attentively listening to the interviewee's perspectives, emotions, and narratives. Document analysis involves scrutinising and interpreting diverse textual sources, including books, articles, reports, diaries, or transcripts.

### **Strengths of Qualitative Research**

1. Qualitative research allows for a deep exploration of complex phenomena such as a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions.<sup>93</sup>
2. Qualitative research is highly flexible and adaptive, allowing interviewers to probe further and ask questions relevant to the subject matter that may not have been considered previously.
3. Qualitative research promotes open discussion by providing an environment where participants can freely express their thoughts and experiences instead of adhering strictly to predetermined questions.

### **Weaknesses of Qualitative Research**

1. The interpretation of qualitative data is inherently subjective and can be influenced by researchers' personal biases, experiences, and perspectives. This fact potentially leads to researcher bias or subjective interpretation of findings.
2. Qualitative research often involves small, non-random samples, thereby limiting the generalisability of findings to broader populations. Whilst qualitative research can provide rich insights, it may not be representative of the larger population.
3. Qualitative research typically requires more time and resources for data collection, transcription, analysis, and interpretation, especially when conducting in-depth interviews or participant observation.

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<sup>93</sup> Abuhamda et. al, "Understanding Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods," 77

4. The privacy of the people taking part may be bridged if the data presentation includes their names. This is an issue especially when sensitive issues are involved.
5. Critics of qualitative research express concerns regarding its replicability.<sup>94</sup> The method is considered non-scientific and presents doubts about the validity of its findings. The argument is that qualitative researchers produce subjective narratives without means of verification. Thus, this approach relies on personal accounts and emotions, hence yielding less reliable and consistent data compared to quantitative approaches.

### **Some Approaches to Qualitative Research**

Some common approaches to qualitative research include the following.

#### ***Phenomenological Approach***

Phenomenological research is a qualitative strategy aimed at understanding and describing the fundamental elements of a phenomenon by examining human experiences in daily life. The researcher aims to uncover the essence and meaning of these experiences through in-depth interviews, observations, or other qualitative methods. This approach investigates actual experiences to learn how individuals perceive them. The researcher assumes that individuals use a common framework to interpret their experiences and analyse participants' emotions, perceptions, and beliefs to determine the essence of the phenomenon. To achieve this, researchers must set aside any preconceived notions they may have regarding the experience or phenomenon.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Daniel, "The Usefulness of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods," 93.

<sup>95</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 23. Phenomenology if further considered in section 3.9.

### ***Ethnographic Approach***

Ethnography involves immersing oneself in the culture or social context of the participants to understand their behaviours, beliefs, and practices.<sup>96</sup> Researchers often spend extended periods in the field, conducting participant observation, interviews, and document analysis to gain a holistic understanding of the culture under study.

### ***Advantages of Ethnography***

- i. Ethnography allows the researcher to closely observe a group's customs and culture.<sup>97</sup> This provides the research with a first-hand understanding of how people behave and interact in a specific context.
- ii. The use of the ethnographic method immerses the researcher in a social setting.<sup>98</sup> This gives the researcher access to more accurate information and an understanding of dynamics that cannot be captured through mere questioning.
- iii. Ethnography is adaptable and open-ended.<sup>99</sup> It aims to provide a rich, detailed account of a particular culture and to explore various aspects of the group and setting rather than trying to verify a general theory or test a hypothesis.

### ***Disadvantages of Ethnography***

- i. Ethnography is labor-intensive and requires significant time investment.<sup>100</sup> It often requires several months to gather enough observations for a comprehensive understanding.
- ii. There is a risk of observer bias in ethnographic research, as being embedded in the group can make it challenging to maintain the necessary distance for objective analysis.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Chinyere. N. Ugwu and Val Eze, "Qualitative Research," *Idosr Journal of Computer and Applied Sciences* 8(1) (2023):20-35, 21.

<sup>97</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 21.

<sup>98</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 21.

<sup>99</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 21.

<sup>100</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 21.

<sup>101</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 21.

- iii. Ethical considerations are crucial in ethnography, including how researchers disclose their role to group members and how they observe and report sensitive information.<sup>102</sup>

### ***Grounded Theory Approach***

Grounded theory is an inductive research method where theories are generated from the data, in contrast to traditional hypothesis-deductive approaches that begin with a hypothesis which is then tested for validation or refutation.<sup>103</sup> Thus, grounded theory aims to develop theories or explanations based on the data collected during the research process. Researchers use a systematic approach to analyse the data. This allows themes and concepts to emerge organically from the data rather than imposing preconceived theories.

### ***Benefits of Using Grounded Theory***

- i. The results from grounded theory closely reflect real-world settings since the theories are derived from data gathered through in-depth interviews and observations in natural environments.<sup>104</sup>
- ii. Conclusions drawn through the grounded theory are directly tied to the collected data.<sup>105</sup> This point contrasts the grounded theory with other approaches that rely more on external theoretical frameworks.
- iii. Grounded theory is ideal for inductive research as it allows for the creation of new theories without preconceived notions.
- iv. Grounded theory provides specific analytic techniques.<sup>106</sup> This ensures a structured and systematic approach despite its open-ended nature.

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<sup>102</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 21.

<sup>103</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 22.

<sup>104</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 22.

<sup>105</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 22.

<sup>106</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 22.

- v. Grounded theory established a close relationship between data collection and analysis.<sup>107</sup> This simplifies the research process by ensuring that the gathered data adequately supports the conclusions.
- vi. As an intertwined process of data collection and analysis, grounded theory helps prevent the confirmation of existing biases, hence ensuring objective results.<sup>108</sup>

### ***Limitations of Grounded Theory***

- i. Grounded theory may have recruitment challenges.<sup>109</sup> Theoretical sampling, an iterative recruitment process, can be difficult as it requires continuously finding new participants whose criteria evolve based on ongoing data analysis.
- ii. Grounded theory is time-consuming during data collection.<sup>110</sup> The unpredictable amount of data needed to reach theoretical saturation means the data collection process can be lengthy and requires flexibility.
- iii. Grounded theory involves complex analyses.<sup>111</sup> The continuous process of comparing various data snippets can be challenging and make it difficult to keep track of comparisons and conclusions.

### ***Narrative Approach***

The narrative approach focuses on exploring individuals' stories, experiences, and perspectives as conveyed through their own narratives or storytelling.<sup>112</sup> The researcher examines the structure, content, and meaning of these narratives to gain insight into the lived experiences of participants. It focuses on how stories are constructed, for whom, why, and the cultural discourses they draw from. The

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<sup>107</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 22.

<sup>108</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 22.

<sup>109</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 22.

<sup>110</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 22.

<sup>111</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 22-23.

<sup>112</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 23.

methodology is based on the idea that individuals understand and find meaning in their lives through the stories they tell, and so people organise their life experiences narratively. This approach is valuable because it represents social phenomena in their full complexity and provides rich insights into the meanings people attribute to their everyday social contexts.<sup>113</sup>

### ***Case Study Approach***

Case studies involve an in-depth examination of a specific case, individual, group, or organisation to understand a particular phenomenon within its real-life context. Researchers collect multiple sources of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, to provide a comprehensive analysis of the case.

Case studies encompass various classifications based on their purpose and subject. They can focus on individuals, groups, organisations, locations, or events, each offering distinct insights into real-world phenomena. Additionally, case studies serve different purposes, such as explanatory, descriptive, exploratory, intrinsic, critical instance, instrumental, and cumulative, each designed to achieve specific research goals. These studies are particularly valuable for exploring complex real-world topics, illustrating points, discussing event implications, or comparing individual experiences. They are often utilised during the exploratory phase of research to gather qualitative data, support or refute hypotheses, and guide future investigations.

According to Yin, a case study approach is suitable under the following circumstances: (a) when the study is designed to address “how” and “why” questions; (b) when the researcher lacks the ability to manipulate participant behavior; (c) when studying contextual conditions considered pertinent to the phenomenon being studied;

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<sup>113</sup> Ugwu and Eze, “Qualitative Research,” 23.

and (d) when there is ambiguity regarding the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context.<sup>114</sup>

### ***Action Research Approach***

Action research is a type of qualitative research that aims to improve practice by examining the effects of actions taken.<sup>115</sup> It involves collaboration between researchers and participants to identify and address practical problems or issues within a specific context.<sup>116</sup> Researchers often work closely with stakeholders to implement interventions, evaluate outcomes, and generate knowledge that can inform positive change. Unlike other research, solutions are implemented immediately as part of the research process.

### **Quantitative and Qualitative Methods Compared**

Much has been said about the quantitative and qualitative research approaches in the previous sections. I end the discussions on these traditional research approaches by offering a comparison between them as follows.<sup>117</sup>

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>
<b>Objective</b>	To examine cause and effect relationship between variable	To explore and discover ideas used in the ongoing processes

<sup>114</sup> Yin cited in Pamela Baxter and Susan Jack, “Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers,” *The Qualitative Report* 13(4) (2008): 544-559, 545.

<sup>115</sup> Ugwu and Eze, “Qualitative Research,” 23. For more on this consult Boaheng, *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies*, 199-203.

<sup>116</sup> For more on this see David Tripp, “Action research: a methodological introduction,” *Educação e Pesquisa* (special edition) 31(3) (2005): 444-467.

<sup>117</sup> The table has been taken, with additions and modifications, from Sharique Ahmad, Saeeda Wasim, Sumaiya Irfan, Sudarshana Gogoi, Anshika Srivastava, and Zarina Farheen, “Qualitative v/s. Quantitative Research: A Summarised Review,” *J. Evid. Based Med. Healthc* 6(43), (2019): 2828-2832, 2829. DOI: 10.18410/jebmh/2019/587

<b>Inquiry</b>	Result-oriented	Process-oriented
<b>Approach</b>	Objective	Subjective
<b>Concepts</b>	Distinct variables	Themes, motifs, generalisations, taxonomies
<b>Measures</b>	Systematically created and standardised	More specific and contextualised to the setting or researcher
<b>Data</b>	Numbers from precise measurement	Words from documents, observations, transcripts
<b>Theory</b>	Largely causal and deductive	Causal or non-causal, often inductive
<b>Procedures</b>	Standardised with assumed replication	Particularly with difficult replication
<b>Analysis</b>	Statistical analysis, relating to hypotheses	Extracting themes, organising data for a coherent picture, generating hypotheses from generalisations
<b>Hypothesis</b>	Tested	Generated

*Table 3.1: Comparison Between Quantitative and Qualitative Methods*

### 3.3 Mixed-Methods Approach

A mixed-methods research design is a procedure for gathering, analysing, and blending quantitative and qualitative research approaches and techniques in a single study to understand a particular research problem.<sup>118</sup> The blending or integration can occur concurrently or sequentially, with one type of data often being prioritised over the other.<sup>119</sup> The study involves the fusion of these

<sup>118</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 81; Lok Raj Sharma, Sandesh Bidari, Dinesh Bidari, Sushil Neupane and Rambabu Sapkota, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design: Types, Purposes, Strengths, Challenges, and Criticisms," *Global Academic Journal of Linguistics and Literature* 5(1), (2023): 3-12, 2.

<sup>119</sup> J. W. Creswell, V. L. Plano Clark, M. L. Gutmann, and W. E. Hanson, "Advanced mixed methods research designs," In: A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of Mixed*

data types at various stages throughout the research process. That is, a mixed-methods approach combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative research within a single study. This allows researchers to gain complementary insights and triangulate findings. This approach involves collecting and analysing both numerical and non-numerical data.

Mixed-methods research aims to capitalise on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Thus, it provides a more comprehensive understanding of research questions and phenomena. Whilst mixed-methods research allows for the triangulation of data and provides a more holistic understanding of complex phenomena, it requires expertise in both quantitative and qualitative methods and can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. A mixed-methods researcher (i). Collects both quantitative and qualitative data: (ii). “Mixes” them at the same time (concurrently) or one after the other (sequentially) and (iii). Emphasises both equally or unequally

### **When to use Mixed-Methods Approaches**

The mixed-methods approach may be considered under the following conditions.

- i. When combining both quantitative and qualitative data yields a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem compared to either type alone.<sup>120</sup>
- ii. When neither qualitative nor quantitative research alone suffices to adequately address the research problem or answer the research questions.<sup>121</sup>
- iii. When the researcher wants to consider multiple viewpoints, acknowledging both biased and unbiased perspectives, and blending subjective and objective approaches.

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*Methods in Social and Behavioral Research* (pp. 209–240) (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 212.

<sup>120</sup> Sharma et. al, “Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design,” 2.

<sup>121</sup> Sharma et. al, “Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design,” 2.

### Convergent (Parallel or Concurrent) Design

A mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently (simultaneously) but analysed separately using analytical approaches.<sup>122</sup> The findings are then compared or integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem.

This approach has some advantages. For example, it enables the researcher to obtain a more complete understanding of two databases. Another advantage is that it allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of what motivates and demotivates students to do research by drawing on both types of data. However, the convergent design demands significant effort and expertise due to several challenges, particularly concerning sample selection and sizes.<sup>123</sup> Integrating two distinct sets of data poses a considerable challenge, as does the resolution of discrepant results.<sup>124</sup> The steps in this approach are integrated and represented in the diagram below.<sup>125</sup>

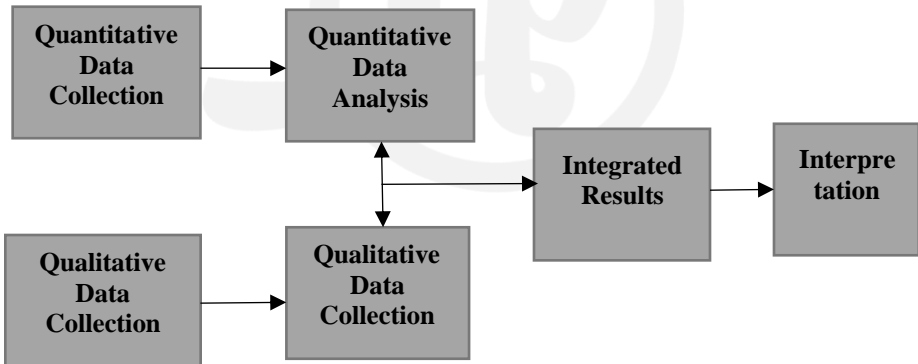


Figure 3.1: Convergent (Parallel or Concurrent) Design

<sup>122</sup> Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, “Mixed-Methods Research,” 29; Sharma1 et. al, “Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design,” 6.

<sup>123</sup> Sharma et. al, “Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design,” 6.

<sup>124</sup> Sharma et. al, “Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design,” 6.

<sup>125</sup> Author’s construct.

### **When to use Convergent Design**

Choose this design if:

- i. There is a need to collect both types of data in one visit to the field
- ii. Both types of data have equal value for understanding the research problem
- iii. The researcher has both quantitative and qualitative research skills
- iv. The researcher can manage extensive data collection activities individually or with a team

### **Sequential Explanatory Design**

In this and the next type of mixed-methods design, the objective is to use the outcomes of one method to inform or construct another method.<sup>126</sup> These designs may start with a qualitative method preceding a quantitative approach (exploratory) or begin with a quantitative investigation followed by a qualitative inquiry (explanatory).

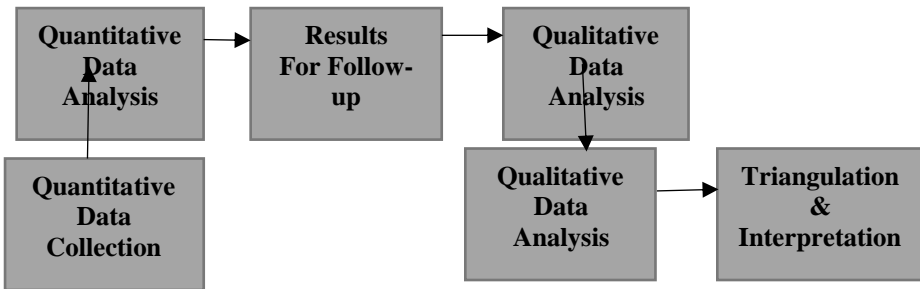
Sequential explanatory design is a two-phase design where quantitative data is collected and analysed first, then qualitative data is collected and analysed based on the quantitative results.<sup>127</sup> This method connects the phases by using the quantitative results to shape the qualitative research questions, sampling, and data collection. The qualitative data is used to explain the quantitative data. The steps in this approach are integrated and represented in the diagram below.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 6.

<sup>127</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 83; Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, "Mixed-Methods Research," 30.

<sup>128</sup> Author's construct.



*Figure 3.2: Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design*

This method uses qualitative data to help explain quantitative results that need further exploration. It also uses quantitative results to purposefully select the best participants for qualitative study. However, it is lengthy and its requirement to contact the participants for the second time can make it difficult to use.<sup>129</sup>

### **When to use Sequential Explanatory Design**

Choose this design if:

- i. The researcher and research problem lean towards a quantitative orientation.
- ii. Key variables and instruments are well-established.
- iii. Participants are accessible for a subsequent data collection phase.
- iv. Sufficient time is available to carry out both phases.
- v. Limited resources necessitate the collection and analysis of one data type sequentially.
- vi. New inquiries arise from the findings of the quantitative phase.

### **The Exploratory Sequential Design**

The exploratory sequential design is a design where qualitative data is collected and analysed (to inform theory, instrument, etc. for

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<sup>129</sup> Sharma et. al, “Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design,” 6.

testing) followed by quantitative data.<sup>130</sup> Qualitative findings inform the development of quantitative measures or instruments, and the researcher then quantitatively tests the identified variables through a critical examination of how the quantitative data both generalise and expand upon the qualitative findings.<sup>131</sup> This means the researcher analyses the qualitative data and uses the results to build to the subsequent quantitative phase. This design connects the two stages by utilising insights from the qualitative analysis to define research inquiries and variables, construct measurement tools, and/or formulate a classification system.

The exploratory sequential design proves beneficial in scenarios where the researcher and research focus lean towards qualitative exploration.<sup>132</sup> It is particularly useful when the initial issue is identified through a small sample and the researcher intends to validate it using a larger sample size.<sup>133</sup> This design is also useful when little is known about the phenomenon under investigation, and qualitative methods are employed to gain insights and generate hypotheses. These hypotheses are then tested quantitatively in the subsequent phase. This design allows researchers to delve deeply into the subject matter before quantitatively assessing relationships and patterns. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the research problem by combining the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, it can be time-consuming.<sup>134</sup> Setting the procedures for developing a credible and reliable instrument for this approach can be challenging.<sup>135</sup> The steps in this approach are integrated and represented in the diagram below.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 83; Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, "Mixed-Methods Research," 30; Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 6.

<sup>131</sup> Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, "Mixed-Methods Research," 31.

<sup>132</sup> Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, "Mixed-Methods Research," 31.

<sup>133</sup> Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, "Mixed-Methods Research," 31.

<sup>134</sup> Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 7.

<sup>135</sup> Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 7.

<sup>136</sup> Author's construct.

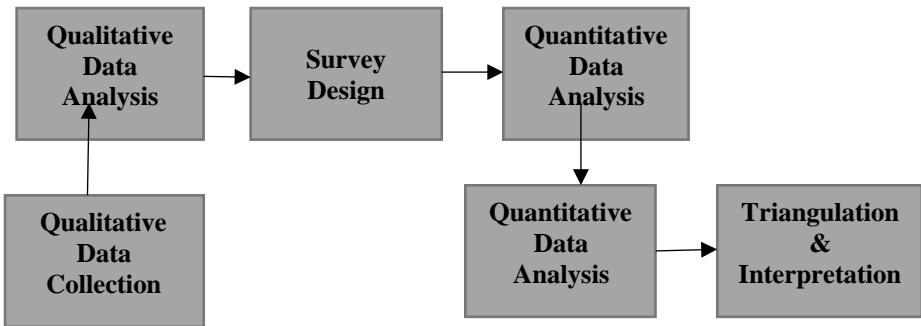


Figure 3.3: The Exploratory Sequential Design

### When to use Exploratory Sequential Design

Choose this method if:

- The researcher prioritises qualitative approaches and the research problem also supports this prioritisation.
- Essential variables are unidentified, and suitable instruments are lacking.
- Adequate time is allocated for two sequential phases.
- Resource constraints dictate the collection and analysis of one data type at a time.
- Fresh inquiries have surfaced following the analysis of qualitative findings.

### Embedded Design

The embedded design (or nested design) is a mixed-methods research that involves one type of data collection and analysis being the primary focus, with the other type of data being embedded within it to provide additional context or insights.<sup>137</sup> In an embedded design, either qualitative data are nested within a quantitative study or quantitative data are nested within a qualitative study.<sup>138</sup> One set of data is used as primary and the other as secondary data.<sup>139</sup> For

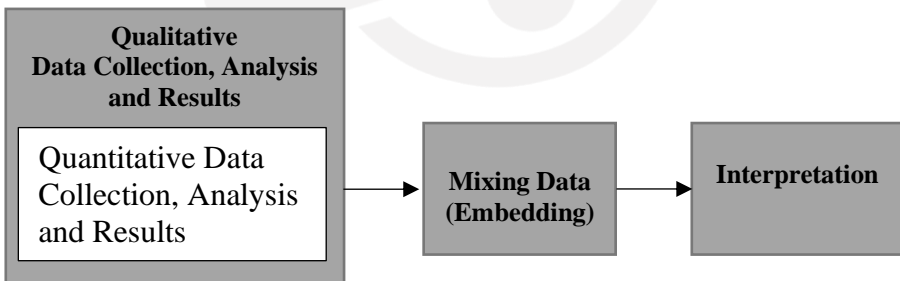
<sup>137</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 82.

<sup>138</sup> Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 7.

<sup>139</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 82.

example, in a quantitative study with an embedded qualitative component, surveys or experiments might be the primary method of data collection, whilst qualitative interviews or observations are embedded within to provide a richer contextual understanding or to explore unexpected findings.

Conversely, in a qualitative study with an embedded quantitative component, interviews or observations might be the primary method, with quantitative surveys or measures embedded within to provide statistical validation or to quantify certain aspects of the qualitative findings. The embedded design allows researchers to capitalise on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches within a single study; and so, it provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This design enables researchers to triangulate data, validate findings, or explore nuances that may not be evident with a single method alone. Embedded designs may be sequential or convergent. Though very useful, the lack of the required expertise may prevent a researcher from using this approach.<sup>140</sup> The steps in this approach are integrated and represented in the diagram below.<sup>141</sup>



*Fig. 3.4: Embedded Design*

<sup>140</sup> Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 7.

<sup>141</sup> Author's construct.

## When to use Embedded Design

Choose this design if:

- i. The researcher has expertise in the primary design.
- ii. The researcher has little prior experience with the supplemental method.
- iii. Resources limit places equal priority on both methods.
- iv. There is a need for a secondary data set to emerge.

## Multiphase Design

A multiphase design in research involves conducting multiple distinct phases or stages within a study to address various aspects of the research problem or to achieve different objectives.<sup>142</sup> Each phase typically involves different data collection methods, analyses, or focuses, and the findings from each phase may inform subsequent phases. For example, a multiphase design might begin with a qualitative exploratory phase to understand the phenomena under investigation, followed by a quantitative phase to test hypotheses derived from the qualitative findings.

Alternatively, it might involve multiple quantitative phases to assess changes over time or to compare different groups. Multiphase designs offer researchers the flexibility to approach complex research questions from multiple angles and to integrate diverse methodologies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.<sup>143</sup> They allow for the refinement of research questions, the validation of findings across different phases, and the exploration of relationships or patterns over time. However, they require high skills in planning and coordination to ensure coherence and consistency across phases. Also, the process of combining the data collected may be complex for the researcher.<sup>144</sup> The steps in this approach are integrated and represented in the diagram below.<sup>145</sup>

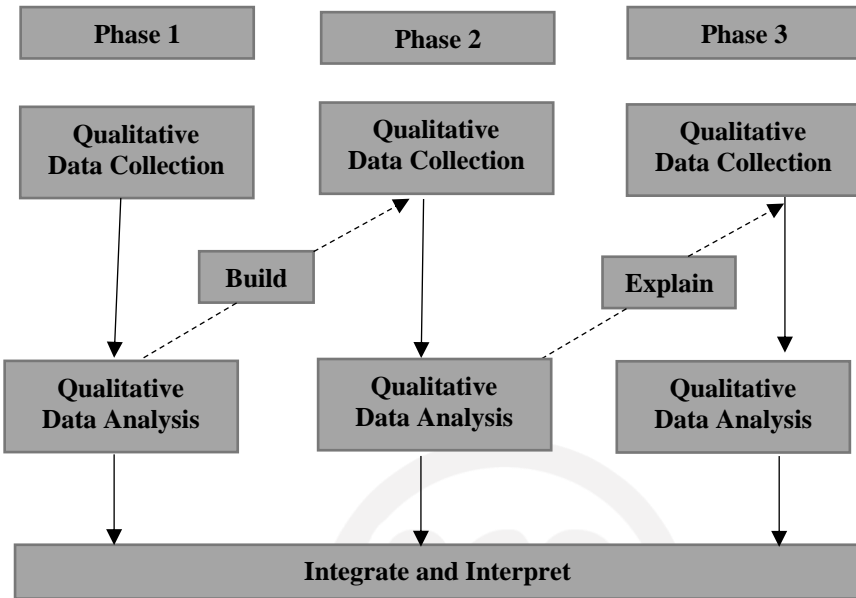
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<sup>142</sup> Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 9.

<sup>143</sup> Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 9.

<sup>144</sup> Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 9.

<sup>145</sup> Author's construct.



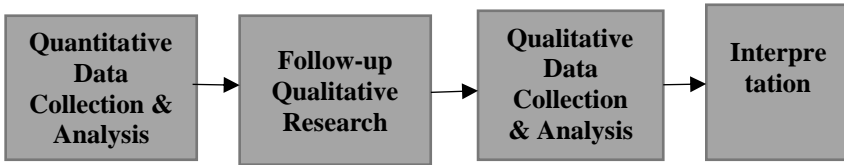
*Fig. 3.5: Multiphase Design*

### **Transformative Mixed-Methods Design**

The transformative mixed-methods design involves gathering and analysing data through both qualitative and quantitative methods to attain a comprehensive understanding that fosters transformation.<sup>146</sup> This approach acknowledges the potential for the research process and its findings to evoke positive change, either within individuals or society as a whole. The efficacy of this approach lies in its inherent value-driven and ideological nature. The steps in this approach are integrated and represented in the diagram below.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Sharma et. al, “Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design,” 8.

<sup>147</sup> Author’s construct.



*Fig. 3.6: Transformative Mixed-Methods Design*

### **Advantages of Mixed-Methods Approaches**

The use of a mixed-methods approach has several advantages, a few of which are outlined briefly below. Firstly, mixed-methods approaches allow for a broader and deeper investigation of research questions.<sup>148</sup> Quantitative data provides breadth, whilst qualitative data offers depth and insight into individual experiences. This normally helps to uncover new insights.

Secondly, the use of mixed-methods approaches helps the researcher deal adequately with the weaknesses inherent in either method. It is argued that “mixing two methods helps to produce a more complete picture and provides an opportunity for a greater assortment of divergent or complementary views.”<sup>149</sup> Thus, by using two methods together, researchers can achieve greater certainty in their findings and a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Thirdly, mixed-methods approaches can help bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative paradigms, and thus allow for a more holistic understanding of phenomena by integrating diverse perspectives and methodologies.<sup>150</sup>

Fourthly, combining the two traditional methods in a single research leverages the strengths of each method whilst compensating

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<sup>148</sup> Saraswati Dawadi, Sagun Shrestha and Ram A. Giri, “Mixed-Methods Research: A Discussion on its Types, Challenges, and Criticisms,” *Journal of Practical Studies in Education*, 2(2), (2021): 25-36, 27.

(DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46809/jpse.v2i2.20>)

<sup>149</sup> Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, “Mixed-Methods Research,” 27-28.

<sup>150</sup> Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, “Mixed-Methods Research,” 28.

for their weaknesses and hence producing a more robust result/conclusion.<sup>151</sup> Mixed-methods approaches, therefore, allow researchers to address different types of research questions effectively.

### **Disadvantages of Mixed-Methods Approaches**

Despite the above advantages, the mixed-methods research approaches have some setbacks, some of which are outlined below. Firstly, conducting mixed-methods research can be time-consuming, labour-intensive, and costly.<sup>152</sup> It requires expertise in both quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as coordination and integration of data collection and analysis processes.

Secondly, integrating quantitative and qualitative data can be challenging, particularly in terms of synthesising findings and reconciling divergent results.<sup>153</sup> Researchers must carefully consider how to merge different types of data whilst maintaining methodological rigour.

Thirdly, mixing quantitative and qualitative data may introduce biases if not done carefully.<sup>154</sup> Researchers may unintentionally prioritise one method over the other, leading to skewed interpretations or overlooking important insights from one dataset.

Fourthly, reporting findings from mixed-methods research can be challenging due to the complexity of the study design and analysis.<sup>155</sup> Communicating results effectively to diverse audiences, including both quantitative and qualitative findings, requires a clear and concise presentation. Consequently, not every researcher can use this approach.

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<sup>151</sup> Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, "Mixed-Methods Research" 28.

<sup>152</sup> Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, "Mixed-Methods Research," 32.

<sup>153</sup> Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, "Mixed-Methods Research," 32; Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 6.

<sup>154</sup> Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 6.

<sup>155</sup> Sharma et. al, "Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Design," 6.

Fifthly, combining multiple methods can sometimes lead to a loss of focus or clarity in research objectives. Researchers may struggle to maintain coherence between the quantitative and qualitative components of the study, which may result in a less cohesive overall analysis.

Sixthly, choosing an appropriate mixed-methods research design and ensuring quality in data integration present significant challenges, particularly regarding the potential influence of one method on another.<sup>156</sup>

Related to the above discussions is the concept of triangulation. The next section has more to say about this.

### **3.4 Triangulation in Empirical Research**

In Mathematics, triangulation is a method used to find the location of a fixed point based on the laws of trigonometry.<sup>157</sup> These laws state that “if one side and two angles of a triangle are known, the other sides and angle can be calculated.”<sup>158</sup> Its exact origins are unclear, but it was widely used in ancient Egypt and Greece.<sup>159</sup> Historically, it was essential in maritime navigation, surveying, and civil engineering.

The use of triangulation in social research is a recent development. It was in the 1970s that sociologists adapted triangulation to combine data from different sources.<sup>160</sup> Triangulation is a research technique that combines multiple sources, methods, theories, or researchers’ perspectives to investigate a phenomenon.<sup>161</sup> This approach helps researchers validate their findings, minimise bias, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. It does so by integrating diverse data sources or approaches. This approach strengthens the reliability

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<sup>156</sup> Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, “Mixed-Methods Research,” 32.

<sup>157</sup> David Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation* (Geneva: UNAIDS, 2010), 12.

<sup>158</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 12.

<sup>159</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 12.

<sup>160</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*

<sup>161</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 83; Sharma et. al, “Exploring the Mixed Methods Research Designs,” 6.

and robustness of research findings, as discrepancies or convergences among different sources or methods can provide deeper insights and corroborate the results.

Triangulation is commonly used in qualitative research, but it can also be applied in quantitative and mixed-methods studies to strengthen the overall research design and interpretation of results. Mixed-methods researchers consistently incorporate methodological triangulation to ensure comprehensive investigation.<sup>162</sup>

### **Types of Triangulation**

Triangulation exists in different forms. This section considers a few of these forms.

#### ***Data Triangulation***

Data triangulation is the use of various data sources—including time, space, and individuals—to study a particular research problem.<sup>163</sup> In data triangulation, the researcher compares data gathered through different samples and at different times on the same research problem.

The main strength of data triangulation lies in using existing data for review and analysis.<sup>164</sup> Instead of relying on a single study, data triangulation examines a situation using multiple data sources. This broader pool of data increases the likelihood of identifying areas of convergence and divergence that a single study might miss.<sup>165</sup> The diversity of sources ensures a more comprehensive examination of the situation. Also, this approach allows findings to be corroborated and compensates for any weaknesses in the data with the strengths of other data. Thus, it increases the validity and reliability of the results. This approach has been employed in many sectors to strengthen conclusions and reduce the risk of false interpretations.

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<sup>162</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 84.

<sup>163</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 14.

<sup>164</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 21.

<sup>165</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 21.

However, the weaknesses of data triangulation include issues with the quantity and quality of data.<sup>166</sup> Too few data points can render triangulation ineffective, and poor quality data can undermine its usefulness. Additionally, analysing qualitative data from a quantitative perspective can lead to misleading results.<sup>167</sup>

### ***Methodological Triangulation***

Methodological (or methods) triangulation refers to the use of different research methods or approaches to investigate the same situation or phenomenon.<sup>168</sup> The aim is to reduce the deficiencies and biases inherent in any single method.<sup>169</sup> The strengths of one method can compensate for the weaknesses of another. This type of triangulation is similar to mixed method approaches in social science research, where one method's results enhance and clarify another's.<sup>170</sup> Here, the emphasis is on the use of different methods rather than the use of different locations, or populations.

The main strength of methods triangulation is its ability to reveal unique differences or significant information that might be missed with a single approach.<sup>171</sup> Combining quantitative and qualitative methods improves the validity and reliability of findings by ruling out alternative explanations for change. Qualitative insights can clarify the success of an intervention when quantitative data alone are insufficient.<sup>172</sup> Experts believe that both across-method and within-method triangulation produce richer findings than relying on one method.

However, methods triangulation has drawbacks, such as the high cost of using multiple methods, the challenge of integrating different types of findings, and the varying quality of studies.<sup>173</sup> It is

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<sup>166</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 22.

<sup>167</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 22.

<sup>168</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 14.

<sup>169</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 14.

<sup>170</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 15.

<sup>171</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 22.

<sup>172</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 22.

<sup>173</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 22.

important to remember that inaccuracies in one method do not offset those in another. This underscores the need for proven methods in both quantitative and qualitative research.

### ***Investigator Triangulation***

Investigator triangulation involves multiple researchers or investigators in data collection, analysis, or interpretation.<sup>174</sup> Thus, in this design, more than one investigator examines the same question. Their results are then compared. Confirming findings across different investigators—without prior discussion or collaboration—can significantly enhance the credibility of the results.<sup>175</sup> Investigator triangulation is effective for reducing bias in the collection, reporting, and analysis of study data.

A key strength of investigator triangulation is the reduction of bias in data gathering, reporting, and analysis. Multiple investigators can enhance validity and reliability and bring diverse expertise, such as quantitative or qualitative research skills.<sup>176</sup> This approach ensures a broader and more balanced perspective on the situation. Corroborating data and verifying interpretations across multiple investigators can increase the value of the findings.<sup>177</sup>

However, investigator triangulation has potential weaknesses. Different investigators might resist or overreact to others' perspectives, undermining objectivity.<sup>178</sup> Additionally, conflicts can arise if investigators work with the same subpopulation, disrupting the studies.<sup>179</sup>

### ***Theory Triangulation***

Theory triangulation is when the research uses multiple theoretical frameworks (theories) or hypotheses to study a situation or

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<sup>174</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 15.

<sup>175</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 15.

<sup>176</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 23.

<sup>177</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 23.

<sup>178</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 23.

<sup>179</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 23.

phenomenon.<sup>180</sup> For example, one may use micro and macro theories to address the same research problem. The concept is to examine a situation or phenomenon from various perspectives, using different approaches and questions.<sup>181</sup> Divergent theories or hypotheses, rather than similar or compatible ones, are more likely to uncover distinct issues and concerns.<sup>182</sup>

The primary strength of theoretical triangulation lies in its ability to conduct a deeper and broader examination of findings.<sup>183</sup> Using a single theory, perspective, or hypothesis may limit alternative explanations for a situation or phenomenon. Conversely, employing multiple, even conflicting perspectives or hypotheses challenges analysts to explore beyond obvious explanations and uncover more nuanced ways of understanding findings.<sup>184</sup>

However, theoretical triangulation can be confusing and unproductive if the theories or hypotheses involved are not well-defined.<sup>185</sup> The use of opposing theories or hypotheses can also lead to confusion and inefficiency. Analysts should not assume findings are inherently more credible simply because they align with similar theories or hypotheses. All forms of triangulation require careful management to uphold process integrity and ensure credible results, with particular vigilance needed in theoretical triangulation.<sup>186</sup>

### **Why do Triangulation?**

The following conditions may inform a researcher to use triangulation.

1. Triangulation relies on the availability of data from diverse sources, investigators, theories, or methods. It serves several important purposes when data are accessible. One may

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<sup>180</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 16.

<sup>181</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 16.

<sup>182</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 16.

<sup>183</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 23.

<sup>184</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 23.

<sup>185</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 24.

<sup>186</sup> Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 24.

consider using triangulation under the following circumstances.<sup>187</sup>

2. Triangulation is valuable when addressing complex questions about programme quality, implementation, outcomes, and impacts. It allows researchers to integrate multiple inputs, offering a broader understanding of underlying issues.
3. When there are adequate but dissimilar data sources, triangulation helps balance perspectives and can lead to valid conclusions or new testable hypotheses. Comparing a wide range of data side by side can reveal insights and inspire new avenues of inquiry.
4. Triangulation becomes crucial when dealing with poor-quality data from various sources, investigators, or methods. It can mitigate the limitations of unreliable data, provided that the validity and reliability of other data sources can be verified.
5. When directly applicable data are lacking, triangulation can use indirectly relevant data to draw valid conclusions. It is essential in these cases to verify the conclusion's accuracy through additional means.
6. Triangulating various data types and sources provides a more precise understanding of epidemic trends and responses.
7. Using readily available data, triangulation offers a valid perspective swiftly, outpacing the time needed for collecting new data in urgent situations.
8. When rigorous, specifically designed research is impractical, triangulation with existing data can be a viable option depending on its depth and breadth.
9. In the absence of direct population-level data, triangulation uses available data from population subsets to infer broader conclusions.

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<sup>187</sup> The title “Why do Triangulation?” and the points outlined under it were taken (generally with slight modifications) from Hales, *An Introduction to Triangulation*, 25-26.

### 3.5 The Concept of Sampling in Empirical Research

#### Sample

A sample refers to a subset of individuals, items, or observations selected from a larger population to conduct research or draw conclusions about the population as a whole. In other words, the sample refers to “the actual number of members, individuals, or cases selected from the target population.”<sup>188</sup>

Since a sample is part of a population, it is important to look at the population to enhance our understanding of “sample.” The population (or target population) refers to the entire group of individuals, items, or entities that meet the criteria for inclusion in the study and about which the researcher aims to draw conclusions.<sup>189</sup> This group is often defined based on specific characteristics, attributes, or criteria relevant to the research question or objectives. A sample is the subset of the population that is used for analysis.

Samples are used in research because it is often impractical or impossible to collect data from an entire population. Usually, researchers study a representative sample to make inferences about the characteristics, behaviours, or attributes of the larger population from which the sample was drawn. The process of selecting a sample involves various sampling methods and techniques to ensure its representativeness and minimise bias. The next section considers this concept.

#### Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting a subset of individuals, items, or elements from a larger population to represent that population in a research study.<sup>190</sup> The goal of sampling is to obtain a representative sample that accurately reflects the characteristics of the population of interest. Different sampling techniques, such as random sampling, stratified sampling, or convenience sampling, may be employed depending on the research design and objectives.

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<sup>188</sup> Adubofour (ed.), *Research Writing Manual for Project Work & Dissertation*, 14.

<sup>189</sup> Adubofour (ed.), *Research Writing Manual for Project Work & Dissertation*, 14.

<sup>190</sup> Adubofour (ed.), *Research Writing Manual for Project Work & Dissertation*, 14.

## **Sampling Techniques**

Sampling techniques are classified broadly into two; namely, probability and non-probability sampling.

### ***Probability Sampling***

Probability (or random) sampling uses statistical theory to randomly select a small group of people (sample) from an existing large population and then predict that all their responses will match the overall population. There is random selection and a known probability for each member. This sampling technique allows researchers to make statistical inferences about the population based on the characteristics of the sample. Some common types of probability sampling methods are outlined below.

#### ***Simple Random Sampling***

In simple random sampling, every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected for the sample.<sup>191</sup> This method typically involves using random number generators or random selection techniques to ensure randomness in the selection process.

#### ***Stratified Sampling***

Stratified sampling involves dividing the population into subgroups, or strata, based on certain characteristics (e.g., age, gender, income), and then randomly selecting samples from each stratum.<sup>192</sup> This method ensures that each subgroup is adequately represented in the sample.<sup>193</sup>

#### ***Systematic Sampling***

Systematic sampling (sampling at regular intervals) involves selecting every  $n$ th member of the population after randomly

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<sup>191</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 89.

<sup>192</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 90.

<sup>193</sup> Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 148.

selecting a starting point.<sup>194</sup> For example, if the population size is 1000 and the desired sample size is 100, researchers would select every 10th individual after randomly selecting one of the first 10 individuals.

### ***Cluster Sampling***

Cluster (or area) sampling involves dividing the population into clusters or groups and then randomly selecting entire clusters as the sampling units.<sup>195</sup> This method is often used when it is more practical or cost-effective to sample groups rather than individuals.

### **Non-Probability Sampling**

Non-probability (or non-random) sampling is a sampling technique in which the selection of samples is not based on random selection from a population but rather relies on the subjective judgment of the researcher or other non-random methods. This approach is often less rigorous and may introduce bias, as it does not ensure that every member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample.

Non-probability sampling methods are commonly used in situations where it is difficult or impractical to obtain a random sample, such as in qualitative research or when studying hard-to-reach populations. Some common types of non-probability sampling methods are outlined below.

### ***Purposive Sampling***

Purposive sampling (judgmental or selective sampling) is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers deliberately select participants or cases based on specific criteria relevant to the research

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<sup>194</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 89; Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 146.

<sup>195</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 91; Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 149.

question or objectives.<sup>196</sup> Unlike random sampling methods that aim to ensure every member of the population has an equal chance of being included, purposive sampling focuses on selecting participants who possess characteristics, experiences, or insights that are deemed valuable or relevant to the study. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research, where the researcher seeks to gain an in-depth understanding or explore specific phenomena rather than generalise findings to a larger population.

### ***Snowball Sampling***

Snowball sampling (chain-referral sampling) is a non-probability sampling technique used primarily in qualitative research to identify and recruit participants who are difficult to reach or locate.<sup>197</sup> This method relies on existing participants to refer other potential participants who share relevant characteristics or experiences. Thus, already chosen participants recommend others whom they believe possess the necessary characteristics, and this process continues until the researcher has recruited a sufficient number of cases.

### ***Quota Sampling***

A quota refers to “a share assigned to a group or each member of a group.”<sup>198</sup> Quota sampling involves dividing the population into subgroups or strata and then setting quotas for each subgroup based on certain characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity).<sup>199</sup> The researcher then selects individuals to meet these quotas, often using convenience or purposive sampling methods within each subgroup. Whilst this method ensures representation from different subgroups, it does not guarantee randomness or equal selection probabilities.

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<sup>196</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 42; Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 137-138.

<sup>197</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 42.

<sup>198</sup> Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 139.

<sup>199</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 43.

### ***Convenience/Accidental Sampling***

This involves selecting individuals who are readily available or easily accessible to the researcher.<sup>200</sup> For example, a researcher might recruit participants from a university campus or a specific community event. In this case, the researcher places themselves at vantage points in order to get access to the participants.<sup>201</sup> Here, the participants are selected purely by accident or chance. Whilst convenient, this approach may introduce bias, as it does not ensure that the sample is representative of the population.

### **Sample Space**

The sample space (the population or target population) refers to the entire set of individuals, items, or elements that are eligible to be included in a research study. It represents the broader group to which the findings of the study are intended to be generalised. The sample space defines the boundaries of the population from which the sample will be drawn.

### **Sample Size**

Sample size refers to the number of individuals, units, items, or elements included in a sample selected from the population.<sup>202</sup> The determination of sample size is an important aspect of research design and depends on factors such as the research objectives, the level of desired precision, the variability within the population, and practical considerations such as time and resources.

A larger sample size generally provides greater statistical power and precision, but it also entails increased cost and effort. Conversely, a smaller sample size may be sufficient for certain research questions but may yield less reliable or generalisable results.

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<sup>200</sup> Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 43.

<sup>201</sup> Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 136.

<sup>202</sup> Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 135.

### 3.6 Data Collection

Data collection involves gathering information or observations relevant to the research question or objectives. This process can take various forms depending on the research methodology and objectives. Researchers must carefully design data collection procedures to ensure that the data collected are valid, reliable, and relevant to the research objectives. Ethical considerations such as obtaining informed consent and protecting participant confidentiality must be addressed during data collection.

Access is the initial phase of data collection. Whether it involves written documents, workplaces, survey participants, or interview subjects, credible data collection is unattainable without gaining access.<sup>203</sup>

#### Data Collection Tools

Data collection tools refer to the techniques and methods used to gather information relevant to the research topic. Examples of methods for field research data collection are outlined below.

##### Surveys

Surveys involve administering structured questionnaires or interviews to gather data from a sample of participants. Survey questions can be categorised as either open or closed. Open questions prompt respondents to formulate responses using their own language.<sup>204</sup> In this case, respondents have the freedom to provide any information or express any opinion they desire, although the allotted space for an answer typically restricts the response length. Closed questions, on the other hand, compel respondents to select from a set of predefined responses.<sup>205</sup>

The survey may be cross-sectional or longitudinal depending on its frequency. **Cross-sectional surveys** collect data from a sample of individuals at a single point in time. They provide a snapshot of

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<sup>203</sup> O'Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Research*, 150.

<sup>204</sup> O'Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Research*, 159.

<sup>205</sup> O'Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Research*, 159.

the population's characteristics or opinions at that specific moment. Cross-sectional surveys are useful for examining prevalence, correlations, or associations between variables at a particular time.

**Longitudinal surveys** involve collecting data from the same sample of individuals over multiple time points. These surveys track changes or trends in attitudes, behaviours, or characteristics over time, allowing researchers to study developmental trajectories, causality, or the effects of interventions.

Surveys offer significant advantages. They provide access to a large and diverse sample size, reaching customers worldwide and those with limited internet access. Additionally, surveys are cost-effective; they offer valuable insights at a reasonable price. They generate reliable information about audience perceptions and attitudes towards brands, which, with proper analysis roll out policies for improved services. Surveys enable brands to improve their customer experience in meaningful ways, thereby fostering trust and positive interactions.

## **Modes of Survey**

### ***Online Surveys***

These are administered electronically through web-based platforms or email. They offer advantages such as cost-effectiveness, convenience, and the ability to reach a large and diverse audience quickly. Online surveys can be cross-sectional, or longitudinal depending on the research objectives. There are a number of helpful tools students could use for empirical research, here are a few of them: Survey Monkey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com>; Typeform: <https://www.typeform.com>; Survio: <https://www.survio.com/en> and Microsoft Forms.

### ***Telephone Surveys***

These involve contacting participants via phone to gather data. They are useful for reaching individuals who may not have internet access and can provide higher response rates compared to online surveys.

Telephone surveys can be cross-sectional or longitudinal, depending on the research design.

### ***Face-to-Face Surveys***

These surveys involve direct interaction between the researcher and the participant, typically conducted in person at a specific location such as the participant's home, workplace, or a public space. The personal engagement inherent in face-to-face surveys allows the researcher to establish rapport with respondents, which can lead to higher response rates and more detailed answers. However, they can be time-consuming and expensive due to the need for trained interviewers and travel costs.

### **Kinds of Survey**

#### ***Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)***

These are a form of in-person surveying approach involving a panel typically comprising 6–10 individuals representing the target demographic. Each participant contributes responses and engages in discussion, facilitated by a skilled moderator striving to maintain focus and impartiality.<sup>206</sup> FGDs are effective for stimulating group dynamics to generate diverse ideas and opinions; are suitable for discussing non-sensitive topics openly and, with anonymity, even sensitive issues can be approached and are efficient for quickly gathering opinions on a topic but may not be suitable for controversial subjects due to challenges in moderation.

FGDs offer significant advantages in qualitative research and decision-making processes. They provide rich qualitative data by allowing participants to express their opinions, attitudes, and experiences in their own words, offering deep insights into complex issues. The interactive nature of focus groups stimulates discussion among participants, revealing diverse viewpoints, group norms, and consensus or dissent within a community or target audience. This method is efficient, gathering insights from multiple participants in a

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<sup>206</sup> Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 190-191.

relatively short time, and allows for flexibility in questioning to probe deeper into specifics.

FGDs have disadvantages to consider. They can be influenced by dominant personalities or group dynamics, where some participants may dominate while others stay silent, potentially skewing the representation of opinions. Findings may not always be broadly applicable, as they reflect specific group contexts rather than generalisable trends. Skilled facilitation is essential to manage discussions effectively, navigate sensitive topics, and ensure all participants contribute comfortably. Analysing qualitative data from focus groups can be time-consuming and subjective, requiring careful interpretation of nuanced responses and non-verbal cues. Logistical challenges such as scheduling, recruitment, and venue availability can also impact the feasibility and success of conducting focus groups. Despite these challenges, careful planning can mitigate disadvantages and maximise the strengths of focus groups in qualitative research and decision-making.

In FGDs, there are typically two primary methods to record the session: through note-taking or tape recording.

1. **Note-taking:** This method involves a designated individual (often referred to as a note-taker) who is responsible for capturing key points, themes, and significant statements made during the discussion.<sup>207</sup> The note-taker listens actively and records relevant information in real-time. They may use shorthand or abbreviations to ensure they capture as much detail as possible without interrupting the flow of conversation. Note-taking allows for immediate documentation and can be useful for summarising discussions quickly.
2. **Tape recording:** Alternatively, FGDs can be recorded using audio or video recording equipment.<sup>208</sup> Tape recording captures the entire dialogue verbatim, preserving the exact

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<sup>207</sup> Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 192.

<sup>208</sup> Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 193.

words and nuances of participants throughout the session. This method provides a comprehensive and accurate record of the discussion, including tone of voice, pauses, and non-verbal cues that may not be captured in notes. It allows researchers to review the discussion in detail later, ensuring they do not miss any subtleties or important points.

The choice between note-taking and tape recording depends on the research objectives, resources available, and preferences of the researchers. Note-taking is practical for smaller groups or when immediate summaries are needed, while tape recording offers a complete and precise record suitable for in-depth analysis and verification of findings.

### ***Interviews***

Interviews involve direct interaction between the researcher and participants to gather in-depth qualitative data. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, depending on the research objectives.

**Structured interviews** follow a fixed set of questions asked in a specific order. The questions are predetermined and standardised across all participants to ensure consistency. Structured interviews are useful for collecting quantitative data and comparing responses systematically.

**Semi-structured interviews** use an interview guide with a set of open-ended questions but allow flexibility for the interviewer to explore topics in-depth and probe further based on the participant's responses. This approach combines the reliability of structured questions with the flexibility to capture detailed insights.

**Unstructured (informal or conversational) interviews** are interviews without a predetermined format or specific set of response options.<sup>209</sup> They are more open-ended and free-flowing. The interviewer may have a general topic to explore but allows the

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<sup>209</sup> Kumekpor, *Research Methods & Techniques of Social Science Research*, 188.

conversation to develop naturally, often delving into unexpected areas. Unstructured interviews are valuable for exploring complex issues and uncovering unexpected insights.

Each type of interview method has its strengths and is chosen based on the research objectives, the depth of understanding required, and the nature of the research questions. They all aim to elicit rich qualitative data that provides insights into human experiences and perspectives in social research.

### **Modes of Interviews**

Interviews can be conducted through various modes, each offering distinct advantages and considerations. There are **face-to-face interviews**. These interviews occur in person, typically between the interviewer and participant(s). Face-to-face interviews allow for direct interaction, non-verbal communication observation, and rapport-building. They are valuable for establishing trust and obtaining detailed responses, particularly when discussing sensitive topics or complex issues. However, they can be time-consuming and costly due to travel and logistics.

Interviews may also be conducted telephonically. **Telephone interviews** offer flexibility and convenience for both interviewer and participant. They are less resource-intensive than face-to-face interviews and can reach geographically dispersed participants. They are suitable for shorter interviews or when visual cues are less critical. However, rapport-building may be more challenging, and non-verbal cues are absent.

**Online (virtual) interviews** are also possible because of the advancements in technology. In this case, interviews may be conducted online through video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet) or via email. Online interviews offer geographical flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and convenience for scheduling. Video interviews can replicate face-to-face interactions to some extent, allowing for visual and verbal communication cues. However, technical issues, distractions, and the

potential for respondent anonymity (in email interviews) are considerations.

### **Recording Data During Interview**

Recording information during an interview is crucial for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of data. Here are key practices for recording information during interviews in social research:

1. **Note-taking:** The most common method involves a note-taker capturing key points, participant responses, and observations during the interview. Notes should be clear, concise, and relevant to the research objectives. Using shorthand and abbreviations can help capture information efficiently without missing critical details.
2. **Audio or video recording:** Recording the interview using audio or video equipment provides a verbatim record of the conversation. This method captures nuances such as tone of voice, pauses, and non-verbal cues, which can enrich data analysis.
3. **Digital tools:** Utilising digital tools such as dedicated interview software or apps can streamline data collection and organisation. These tools may offer features like audio transcription, note synchronisation with recordings, and secure storage of interview data.
4. **Observational notes:** In addition to verbal responses, researchers may record observational notes on participant behaviour, environment, and interactions during the interview. These qualitative observations provide context and deeper insights into participant responses.

### ***Expert Forum***

This approach involves convening a group of individuals who possess specialised knowledge or expertise relevant to a particular topic or research question. The first step is to identify and select experts who have relevant knowledge or experience related to the

research topic. These experts may come from academia, industry, government, non-profit organisations, or other sectors.

Once the experts are identified, they are invited to participate in a forum or workshop dedicated to the research topic. This forum can take place in person or virtually, depending on logistical considerations and the preferences of the participants.

During the forum, a structured discussion is facilitated to explore the research topic in depth. This discussion may be guided by a set of predetermined questions or themes, but there is also room for spontaneous exchange and exploration of ideas.

The experts are encouraged to share their insights, perspectives, and experiences related to the research topic. This exchange of ideas helps the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the subject matter and generate new insights or hypotheses. The insights and perspectives shared by the experts are then synthesised and integrated into the research findings. This may involve identifying common themes, areas of agreement or disagreement, and emerging patterns or trends.

The findings resulting from the expert forum are typically subjected to validation and peer review to ensure their reliability and credibility. This may involve sharing the findings with external reviewers or experts who were not part of the original forum. Finally, the findings of the expert forum are reported and disseminated through various channels, such as academic publications, policy briefs, conference presentations, or public forums. This ensures that the insights generated are accessible to relevant stakeholders and contribute to the broader body of knowledge in the field.

### ***Observations***

Observation in research involves systematically watching and recording behaviours, actions, or events in their natural settings to gather data and gain insights into various phenomena.<sup>210</sup> This method allows researchers to directly observe and document behaviours,

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<sup>210</sup> O'Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Research*, 170.

interactions, or occurrences without interference or manipulation. Observation can be conducted in various contexts, including natural environments, controlled laboratory settings, or structured social situations.

Researchers may use techniques such as participant observation, where they immerse themselves in the environment being studied, or non-participant observation, where they remain separate from the observed individuals or events. Observation is often used in qualitative research to generate rich, descriptive data and in quantitative research to supplement other data collection methods or to validate findings.

### ***Questionnaire***

This consists of a series of questions and other prompts (written or printed) to gather information from a statistically significant number of subjects. These questions may be open or closed, quantitative or qualitative. More often than not it is designed for statistical analysis of the responses. The questionnaire is the only method for collecting data for quantitative research.

### **3.7 Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation**

Data presentation involves organising and presenting the collected data in a meaningful and understandable format. This step is crucial for communicating research findings to stakeholders, such as peers, policymakers, or the general public. Data presentation techniques can include tables, charts, graphs, diagrams, and narratives. The choice of presentation format depends on the nature of the data and the intended audience. Effective data presentation enhances clarity, facilitates interpretation, and helps convey key messages derived from the research findings.

Data analysis involves systematically examining, interpreting, and making sense of the collected data to address the research question or objectives. Depending on the research design and methodology, data analysis techniques can range from descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to inferential statistics and

regression modelling. The goal of data analysis is to uncover patterns, relationships, or trends in the data and to draw meaningful conclusions that contribute to answering the research question. Rigorous data analysis ensures the reliability and validity of the research findings and provides insights that inform subsequent research steps or practical applications.

### *Analysing Quantitative Data*

The process of quantitative data analysis typically includes several key steps.

- i. **Data cleaning:** This involves reviewing and preparing the collected data for analysis, which may include checking for errors, inconsistencies, missing values, and outliers.
- ii. **Descriptive statistics:** Descriptive statistics are used to summarise and describe the characteristics of the data, such as measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode), variability (range, standard deviation), and distribution (frequency distributions, histograms).
- iii. **Inferential statistics:** Inferential statistics are used to make inferences or predictions about a population based on sample data. These techniques include hypothesis testing, confidence intervals, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and analysis of variance.
- iv. **Data visualisation:** Data visualisation techniques, such as charts, graphs, and plots, are used to visually represent the data and identify patterns or trends more effectively. Visualisation tools help researchers communicate their findings in a clear and concise manner.
- v. **Interpretation and conclusion:** The final step involves interpreting the results of the data analysis in relation to the research questions or hypotheses. Researchers draw conclusions, make recommendations, and discuss the implications of their findings. It is important to consider the limitations of the study and potential biases during interpretation.

### *Analysing Qualitative Data*

The steps for analysing qualitative data include the following:<sup>211</sup>

- i. **Data organisation:** Qualitative data, often extensive, requires thorough reading to familiarise the researcher, who then organises the data to gain insights.
- ii. **Category, theme, and pattern creation:** Researchers identify distinct categories within the data, establishing relationships between them, and laying the foundation for theory development using manual or computer-assisted coding.
- iii. **Data analysis and interpretation:** After identifying themes and patterns, researchers evaluate data to assess its adequacy, credibility, and consistency, validating hypotheses and assessing the usefulness of information in addressing research questions.
- iv. **Report writing:** Writing a qualitative research report involves providing descriptive accounts of the studied situation, offering analytical insights into the findings' significance and implications, and comparing them to the researcher's expectations.

### **Tips on Data Interpretation**

- i. Understand the research context thoroughly before interpreting the data.
- ii. Highlight the most significant patterns or trends in the findings.
- iii. Consider various perspectives to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data.
- iv. Compare the results with existing literature to assess their significance.
- v. Be open to alternative explanations or interpretations of the data.

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<sup>211</sup> What follows was gleaned from Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research*, 58-59.

- vi. Draw clear and concise conclusions that address the research questions.
- vii. Consider the practical implications of the findings for stakeholders.
- viii. Seek peer review to validate interpretations and conclusions.

### **3.8 Some Approaches to the Study of Religion**

As hinted in the preface, this book was published (almost) simultaneously with another book that deals mostly with methodologies in theology and religious studies (with emphasis on the Christian religion). The other book—*An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies*—is available for free and can be downloaded from <https://noyam.org/eb8012024/>. Considering the title and contents of that book, the present section could have been published in that volume. I, however, chose to maintain the current section in this book for two reasons. First, the approaches outlined in this section usually involve empirical research designs. I, therefore, thought it relevant to place it just after examining empirical research approaches to help the reader link what has just been discussed with a methodological framework.

Second, even though this book is not so much about methodologies, I have been referring to methodologies/approaches here and there. The present section is intended to give the reader a glimpse of what a methodology may look like. Appreciative Inquiry and Participatory Action Research (sections 4.9 & 5.6 respectively in the other book) are other examples of methodologies that apply to all religious studies, especially those involving empirical research.

With these background notes, I proceed to consider the focus of this section. What constitutes a methodology in religious studies? Methodologies within religious studies serve as interpretive frameworks for analysing religious phenomena. Common methodologies include the Philosophy of Religion (Phenomenology), Functionalism, and Lived Religion.

## **Philosophy of Religion (Phenomenology)**

Within the field of religious studies, the Philosophy of Religion employs a phenomenological approach to delve into the essence of religious experience and consciousness. Researchers utilising this method undertake a rigorous philosophical inquiry to unravel the underlying meanings and structures of religious phenomena. Phenomenology seeks to uncover the profound dimensions of belief, ritual, and mystical encounters. It achieves this by focusing on the subjective experiences of individuals and communities. Through philosophical analysis and reflection, researchers strive to deepen our understanding of the nature of religious experience and its implications for human existence.

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a research method aimed at understanding phenomena. This approach seeks to derive meaning from experiences and appearances through participants' reflections. This helps the participants to make sense of their own lived experiences.

### ***Characteristics of Phenomenological Research Design***

- i. **Descriptive approach:** Phenomenological research employs a descriptive research design to accurately depict the structure of a phenomenon.<sup>212</sup>
- ii. **Understanding experiences:** Its purpose is to understand the significance of a particular experience for a group of people and their feelings about it.<sup>213</sup>
- iii. **Bracketing preconceptions:** Researchers using this method must set aside their preconceptions and assumptions to focus solely on the present experience.<sup>214</sup>
- iv. **Unbiased account:** It requires researchers to first provide an unbiased account of the lived experiences before considering

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<sup>212</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 23.

<sup>213</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 23.

<sup>214</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 23.

how these accounts align with pre-existing theories of the phenomenon.<sup>215</sup>

Methodologically, phenomenological research employs various data collection methods to explore lived experiences comprehensively. Common approaches include participant observation, interviews, conversations, analysis of personal texts, action research, and focus groups. These methods are chosen based on their ability to elicit rich, qualitative data that illuminate participants' perspectives without imposing external interpretations.

### **Methodological Steps**

James V. Spickard presents a methodological framework for phenomenological research, from which I developed the following steps.<sup>216</sup>

#### ***Step 1: Identifying the Phenomenon***

The first step in phenomenological research involves identifying the phenomenon under investigation and subsequently developing a detailed description of it. This process begins by clearly defining and delimiting the scope of the phenomenon that is to be studied. The researcher aims to understand the essence and structure of this phenomenon as experienced and perceived by individuals within a specific context or group. Once the phenomenon is identified, the focus shifts to creating a comprehensive description that captures its fundamental aspects.

#### ***Step 2: Identifying Participants***

The next step involves identifying individuals who have undergone a particular experience of interest. Here, the researcher locates and interviews informants who can provide rich and detailed accounts of their lived experiences. This may involve purposive sampling (or any

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<sup>215</sup> Ugwu and Eze, "Qualitative Research," 23.

<sup>216</sup> James V. Spickard, "Phenomenology," *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*. Edited by Steven Engler and Michael Stausberg (London: Routledge, 2012), 338.

other appropriate sampling technique) to ensure participants have a depth of understanding and insight into the phenomenon under investigation.

***Step 3: Guiding Consciousness Exploration***

Once informants are identified, the researcher guides them to reflect on and articulate their experiences. The focus here is on facilitating a deep exploration of how the experience presented itself to the informants' consciousness. This step entails encouraging participants to set aside preconceptions or interpretations of what may have been happening objectively to allow them to delve into the subjective nuances of their lived reality.

***Step 4: Comparative Analysis of Accounts***

After gathering accounts from multiple informants, the researcher engages in a thorough comparative analysis. The goal is to identify recurring themes, patterns, and underlying structures within the accounts. By carefully scrutinising the similarities and differences across informants' experiences, the researcher can uncover the essential elements and fundamental characteristics of the phenomenon being studied.

***Step 5: Redescribing and Summarising the Experience***

In the final step, the researcher synthesises the findings by re-describing or summarising the experience. This involves distilling the accounts down to their basic structures or essences. Through this process of reduction, the researcher aims to capture the core elements that define and characterise the phenomenon. The resulting description provides a comprehensive yet concise depiction of the lived experience; this facilitates deeper understanding and interpretation.

Another approach is lived religion. I briefly describe this in the next section.

## Sociology of Religion or Lived Religion

In recent years, the lived religion approach has gained prominence in the sociology of religion. The concept of lived religion was first introduced to English-speaking academic audiences through the collection “Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice,” edited by historian David Hall in 1997.<sup>217</sup> Hall explains that the term originated from the French “la religion vécue” in sociology of religion but has since evolved independently in English.<sup>218</sup> He describes lived religion as a method of studying American religious history that utilises previously underused perspectives to enhance understanding of the everyday practices and thoughts of laypeople.

The lived religion approach in sociology of religion challenges traditional analyses that focus solely on religious institutions, arguing instead for a deeper exploration of how individuals actively shape their religious beliefs and practices in everyday life.<sup>219</sup> It emphasises that religion is not just a set of prescribed beliefs imposed by institutions but is actively negotiated and interpreted by individuals.<sup>220</sup> This approach recognises the importance of institutional forms of religion but insists on empirically studying their impact on individuals’ lives rather than assuming their influence.

Lived religion is an ethnographic and comprehensive framework that focuses on understanding how religion is practised by everyday individuals in various contexts of daily life, encompassing settings such as homes, workplaces, businesses, communities, and religious institutions.<sup>221</sup> This approach to religious studies research offers a unique perspective within religious studies

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<sup>217</sup> Kim Knibbe and Helena Kupari, “Theorising Lived Religion: Introduction,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 35(2), (2020): 157-176, 160. (DOI: 10.1080/13537903.2020.1759897)

<sup>218</sup> Knibbe and Kupari, “Theorising Lived Religion: Introduction,” 160.

<sup>219</sup> M. B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>220</sup> Knibbe and Kupari, “Theorising Lived Religion: Introduction,” 159.

<sup>221</sup> Knibbe and Kupari, “Theorising Lived Religion: Introduction,” 159.

by focusing on the beliefs, practices, and experiences of religious adherents in their everyday lives. It underscores that religious practices often occur in public or collective settings, underscoring religion's communicative and social nature.<sup>222</sup> Researchers employing this approach study religion as it is practised and experienced by individuals and communities in diverse contexts.

The examination of how religious beliefs and rituals are integrated into daily life highlights the lived experiences of religious practitioners and emphasises the diversity, complexity, and dynamism of religious expression and interpretation. Through this lens, researchers gain insights into how religion shapes identities, worldviews, and social interactions, offering a holistic understanding of religious phenomena.

### **Functionalism**

Functionalism involves the examination of the societal and cultural functions of religion, elucidating its roles within communities and societies. Researchers employing this method analyse how religious institutions, beliefs, and practices contribute to social cohesion, moral order, and the fulfilment of human needs. Functionalism highlights its adaptive and integrative functions, and reveals its impact on individual behaviour, social structures, and cultural norms. Using this approach enables researchers to explore the dynamic interplay between religion and society, shedding light on its multifaceted contributions to human life.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the distinct characteristics and applications of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches research. Whilst qualitative research delves into the complexities of human experiences and social phenomena, quantitative research focuses on objective measurement and statistical analysis. Mixed-methods research combines these approaches, offering a comprehensive

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<sup>222</sup> McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, 98.

understanding of research questions by leveraging the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. By understanding the unique attributes and considerations of each approach, researchers can make informed decisions to effectively address research inquiries and advance knowledge within their fields. In the next chapter, I consider the issue of ethics as it applies to academic research.

### **3.10 Review Exercise**

1. Identify and explain three mixed-methods approaches to research. Outline the advantages and disadvantages of each of them.
2. How does qualitative research compare and contrast with quantitative research?
3. Discuss the various kinds of sampling techniques you know.
4. What are the key characteristics of qualitative research, and how does it differ from quantitative research?
5. How does qualitative research contribute to our understanding of human experiences and social phenomena?
6. What are the strengths and limitations of quantitative research, and how does it complement qualitative approaches?
7. Explain the concept of mixed-methods research and how it integrates qualitative and quantitative methodologies.
8. What are the benefits of using a mixed-methods approach in research?
9. Discuss the considerations that researchers should take into account when selecting between qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches.
10. How can researchers ensure the validity and reliability of findings in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research?
11. Provide examples of research questions or topics that are best suited for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches.

12. How does the choice of research method impact the research process and outcomes?
13. Identify what the following terms represent in research and explain how you would use them in a research project.
  - a. Sampling
  - b. Data collection
  - c. Data presentation
  - d. Data analysis

### **3.11 Suggested Thesis Topics**

1. The Influence of Religious Beliefs on Health-seeking Behavior: A Quantitative Study Among Igbo Residents in Lagos
2. Social Media Use Among Youth in Religious Communities: An Ethnographic Analysis in Limuru, Kenya
3. A Phenomenological Study of the Impact of Islamic Microfinance on Poverty Alleviation: A Case Study of Urban Senegal
4. Religious Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Conservation: A Survey of Rural Communities in South Africa
5. Religious Affiliation and Educational Attainment: A Comparative Analysis Among Urban Youth in Ghana and Ethiopia
6. The Role of Religious Institutions in HIV/AIDS Prevention: A Mixed-Methods Study in Urban Uganda
7. Pentecostalism and Entrepreneurship: An Empirical Investigation Among Urban Women in Zambia
8. Sacred Spaces and Social Integration: A Comparative Study of Urban Mosques and Churches in Ethiopia
9. Religious Influences on Family Planning Practices: A Qualitative Exploration in Urban Tanzania
10. Community Resilience and Religious Coping Strategies: A Longitudinal Study in Post-Conflict Liberia

11. Religious Beliefs and Mental Health Stigma: A Cross-Cultural Analysis Among Urban and Rural Populations in Malawi
12. Interfaith Cooperation and Community Development: A Case Study of Selected Societies in Rwanda
13. Spiritual Well-being and Quality of Life Among Elderly Populations: A Quantitative Analysis in Urban Botswana
14. A Phenomenological Study of the Impact of Religious Education on Civic Engagement Among Urban Youth in Mozambique
15. Rituals and Healing Practices in Trauma Recovery: An Ethnographic Inquiry Among War-Affected Communities in South Sudan
16. Religious Diversity and Trust in Public Institutions: A Comparative Analysis Across Urban and Rural Areas in Ghana
17. Sacred Music and Identity Formation: A Mixed-Methods Study Among Urban Youth in Zimbabwe
18. Pentecostalism and Social Mobility: An Empirical Examination Among Urban Informal Sector Workers in Nigeria
19. Religious Beliefs and Environmental Conservation Attitudes: A Survey of Urban and Rural Dwellers in Kenya
20. A Phenomenological Study of the Community-based Religious Organisations and HIV/AIDS Awareness: A Comparative Study in Urban and Rural Swaziland.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH ETHICS AND RESEARCH INTEGRITY**

In the pursuit of knowledge, researchers are required to conduct their research with the utmost integrity and ethical rigour. From the protection of human subjects to the dissemination of findings, ethical considerations permeate every facet of the research process. This chapter prepares the researcher to uphold the highest ethical standards in their scholarly endeavours.

#### **4.1 What is Research Ethics?**

Research ethics refers to the set of principles, guidelines, and standards that govern the conduct of research involving human participants, animals, or other subjects. It encompasses the ethical considerations and responsibilities of researchers, institutions, and ethics review boards in designing, conducting, and reporting research studies.

Some of the key components of research ethics include informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, minimising harm, transparency, and accountability. Adherence to research ethics is essential for upholding scientific integrity and fostering trust between researchers and the community. These aspects of research ethics are considered in the following sections.

#### **4.2 Ethical Clearance**

Ethical clearance (ethical approval or institutional review) is the process by which research proposals are evaluated to ensure that they meet ethical standards and guidelines. This clearance is typically required before researchers can begin their studies involving human participants, animals, or other subjects.

The primary objective of acquiring ethical clearance within the realms of social sciences and humanities is to safeguard research subjects or respondents from potential physical, psychological, social, and legal ramifications arising from their participation in research endeavours. These hazards encompass physical threats,

psychological stress, emotional regret, societal stigma, ostracism, and the risk of legal repercussions such as lawsuits.

Institutions have ethics committees to work on research ethical clearance applications. This is a very important aspect of the research process. Even though ethical clearance is a requirement for all types of research the clearing process is more stringent for projects involving human participants. Each institution has a set of criteria for assessing ethical clearance applications.

A sample set of guidelines for evaluation of ethical clearance application, based on international practices, is as follows.<sup>223</sup>

- i. The proposed research must demonstrate a robust research design and employ recognised data collection methods.
- ii. The anticipated risks to participants must be acceptable in comparison to the expected benefits and the significance of the knowledge likely to be gained.
- iii. The research must display sensitivity to cultural nuances and cultural and religious traditions.
- iv. Informed consent must be obtained from all participants or their legal guardians.
- v. The approval committee must be convinced that the confidentiality of participant information will be ensured.
- vi. Participant selection must be fair and appropriate.
- vii. Research assistants and other support personnel must have adequate training and the necessary skills, experience, and professional maturity to fulfil their roles.
- viii. Protocols must established for handling potentially sensitive data, highly personal information, observations of criminal activity, or situations involving danger or emergencies. This is especially pertinent when researchers are interacting with children, visiting family homes, or discussing sensitive topics.

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<sup>223</sup> I have taken these guidelines with slight modifications from Zayed University, “Ethical Clearance Guidelines” (2010), 1-2. ([https://www.zu.ac.ae/main/files/contents/research/research\\_integrity/%20ethical\\_clearance\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.zu.ac.ae/main/files/contents/research/research_integrity/%20ethical_clearance_guidelines.pdf) accessed on 2-5-2024).

### 4.3 Ethical Issues in Collecting Data from Field Informants

Collecting data from field informants is a common practice in qualitative research, particularly in disciplines such as religious studies, theological and biblical studies, community studies, anthropology, sociology, and ethnography. However, this process raises important ethical considerations that researchers must navigate with care and sensitivity.

One of the primary ethical concerns when working with field informants is ensuring informed consent. Researchers must clearly explain the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and any potential risks or benefits associated with participation.<sup>224</sup> Additionally, informants should be assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion.

Confidentiality and anonymity are also paramount.<sup>225</sup> Researchers must take steps to protect the privacy of informants and ensure that any data collected is kept confidential.<sup>226</sup> This may involve using pseudonyms or disguising identifying information to prevent the disclosure of sensitive or potentially harmful information.<sup>227</sup>

Furthermore, researchers must consider the power dynamics at play in the researcher-informant relationship. Informants may occupy marginalised or vulnerable positions within their communities, and researchers must be mindful of their influence and the potential for exploitation. Researchers should strive to maintain a respectful and egalitarian relationship with informants, ensuring that their voices are heard and their perspectives are valued.

Finally, researchers must consider the potential impact of their research on the communities from which their informants are drawn.<sup>228</sup> Research findings have the potential to shape perceptions,

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<sup>224</sup> Coffelt, "Confidentiality and anonymity of Participants," 229.

<sup>225</sup> Tina A. Coffelt, "Confidentiality and anonymity of Participants" In: *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, edited by Mike Allen, pp. 228-230 (Los Angeles/Washington: SAGE Publications, 2017), 228.

<sup>226</sup> Coffelt, "Confidentiality and anonymity of Participants," 228.

<sup>227</sup> Coffelt, "Confidentiality and anonymity of Participants," 228.

<sup>228</sup> See Coffelt, "Confidentiality and anonymity of Participants," 229-230.

policies, and practices, and researchers must be cognisant of the potential consequences of their work. This may involve engaging in community consultation or collaboration to ensure that research is conducted in a culturally sensitive and responsible manner.

#### **4.4 Consent in Research**

Consent in research refers to the voluntary agreement of individuals to participate in a research study after being informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study.<sup>229</sup> Consent is a fundamental ethical principle in research and is essential for protecting the rights, autonomy, and welfare of research participants. Key aspects of consent in research include the following.

- i. Participants must be provided with clear and understandable information about the study to allow them to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in the study.
- ii. Participants should not be pressured or manipulated into participating in the study. Participation must be voluntary and the participants should be assured that they have the right to refuse or withdraw from participation at any time without consequence.
- iii. Participants must have the cognitive capacity to understand the information provided and to make a reasoned decision about participation. Special consideration should be given to individuals who may have impaired decision-making capacity, such as minors, individuals with cognitive disabilities, or those who are otherwise vulnerable (see discussion below).
- iv. Consent is an ongoing process that continues throughout the duration of the study. Researchers should maintain open communication with participants, provide updates about any changes to the study protocol or potential risks, and ensure

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<sup>229</sup> Coffelt, “Confidentiality and anonymity of Participants,” 229.

that participants have the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns at any time.

- v. Participants' privacy and confidentiality must be respected throughout the research process. Researchers should clearly explain how participant data will be collected, used, and protected, and they should take measures to minimise the risk of unauthorised disclosure of sensitive information.

#### 4.5 Informed Consent Form

The informed consent Form is a document provided to research participants that outlines key information about a study, including its purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and rights of participants. It serves as a formal agreement between the researcher and the participant, indicating that the participant has been adequately informed about the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.<sup>230</sup>

Even though different institutions have their format and details, the consent form generally provides participants with the following information about the research study.<sup>231</sup>

- i. **Purpose of the study:** A clear explanation of the research objectives and what the researcher hopes to achieve through the study.
- ii. **Procedures:** Details about the specific activities involved in the study, such as interviews, surveys, observations, or experiments.
- iii. **Duration:** The estimated length of time required for participation in the study, including any follow-up procedures.

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<sup>230</sup> Coffelt, "Confidentiality and anonymity of Participants," 228.

<sup>231</sup> Sandrine M. Sidse, Thomas Köhler, Joerg Szarzynsk, "Ethical Issues in Collecting Data from Informant of the Field," Farina Madita Dobrick, Jana Fischer and Lutz M. Hagen (eds.), *Research Ethics in the Digital Age: Ethics for the Social Sciences and Humanities in Times of Mediatisation and Digitisation* pp. 101-106 (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 102. ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-12909-5\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-12909-5_9))

- iv. **Risks and benefits:** An overview of any potential risks or discomforts associated with participation, as well as any potential benefits to the participant or society.
- v. **Confidentiality:** Information about how the participant's data will be handled and protected, including assurances of confidentiality and anonymity where applicable.
- vi. **Voluntary participation:** A statement emphasizing that participation in the study is voluntary and that the participant has the right to withdraw at any time without consequence.
- vii. **Contact information:** Contact details for the researcher or research team, including who to contact with questions or concerns about the study.
- viii. **Consent statement:** A statement indicating that the participant understands the information provided, has had the opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily consents to participate in the study.
- ix. **Signature:** Space for the participant to provide their signature, indicating their informed consent to participate in the study.

Here is a sample.

### **Sample Letter of Informed Consent**<sup>232</sup>

**[Your Institution's Letterhead]**

**[Date]**

**Title of Research Project:** [Research Project Title]

**Principal Investigator:**

- Name: [Your Name]
- Department: [Your Department]
- Contact Information: [Your Email/Phone Number]

**Dear [Participant's Name],**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by [Your Name] from the Department of [Your Department] at [Your

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<sup>232</sup> This is geared towards written consent. If your situation requires oral consent, you can explain the form orally. This sample was generated by ChatGTP. I modified it a bit to suit my purpose.

Institution]. This study aims to [provide a brief summary of the research project, including objectives and expected outcomes].

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to [state the research objectives and what the researcher hopes to achieve through the study].

**Procedures:** If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to [describe the specific activities involved in the study, such as interviews, surveys, observations, or experiments].

**Duration:** The estimated length of time required for your participation in the study is [provide the duration, including any follow-up procedures if applicable].

**Risks and Benefits:** There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study, including [describe any potential risks or discomforts]. Participation in this study may benefit you by [describe any potential benefits to the participant or society].

**Confidentiality:** All information collected during this study will be handled and protected with strict confidentiality. Your identity will not be disclosed in any publications or presentations resulting from this research. Data will be stored securely, and only the research team will have access to it.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time without any consequence or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Principal Investigator, [Your Name], at [Your Email/Phone Number]. For any concerns regarding the ethics of this study, you may contact the Ethics Committee at [Ethics Committee Contact Information].

**Consent Statement:** By signing this form, you confirm that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had the opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

**Participant's Statement:** I have read the information provided above. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and received satisfactory answers. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator's Statement:** I have explained the study to the participant and answered all questions. I will provide a copy of this consent form to the participant.

Name of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your participation in this study. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.**

**[Your Institution's Name and Address]**

### ***Notes on Potential Risks***

For research involving humans and animals, the following potential risks may be considered.

#### **Potential Risks to Humans**

##### **1. Physical Risks**

- i. **Injury, hunger and others:** Participants may experience physical hunger, thirst, tiredness, and dryness during interviews.
- ii. **Side effects:** Participants might suffer from side effects of medications or treatments being tested.

##### **2. Psychological Risks**

- i. **Emotional distress:** Participation in surveys or interviews about traumatic or sensitive subjects may cause emotional distress.
- ii. **Stress and anxiety:** Participation in demanding or stressful tasks might induce anxiety or stress.

### 3. Social Risks

- i. **Privacy breach:** Personal information could be inadvertently disclosed, leading to a breach of confidentiality.
- ii. **Stigmatisation:** Participation in certain studies might lead to social stigma or discrimination, especially in research involving mental health or substance abuse.

### 4. Legal Risks

- i. **Legal consequences:** Disclosure of illegal behaviour (e.g., drug use) during the research could potentially have legal ramifications.

### 5. Economic Risks

- i. **Financial Costs:** Participants might incur costs related to participation, such as travel expenses or time off work.

## Potential Risks to Animals

### 1. Physical Risks:

- i. **Injury or pain:** Animals might experience pain or injury during procedures such as surgeries or injections.
- ii. **Adverse health effects:** Animals could suffer from side effects of experimental treatments or drugs.

### 2. Psychological Risks

- i. **Stress and anxiety:** Handling, transportation, or confinement in unfamiliar environments can cause stress or anxiety in animals.
- ii. **Behavioural changes:** Animals might exhibit changes in behaviour due to the stress or impact of the experimental procedures.

### 3. Environmental Risks

- i. **Habitat disruption:** Animals could experience disruption to their natural habitats or living conditions.

- ii. **Social disruption:** Research procedures might disrupt social structures or bonds within groups of social animals.

## **Mitigation Strategies**

### **1. For Humans**

- i. Ensure thorough informed consent, outlining all potential risks and measures to mitigate them.
- ii. Implement strict confidentiality protocols to protect personal information.
- iii. Provide access to psychological support or counselling for participants if necessary.
- iv. Design studies to minimise physical risks and ensure any interventions are performed by qualified professionals.

### **2. For Animals**

- i. Follow ethical guidelines and protocols for the humane treatment of animals.
- ii. Use the minimum number of animals necessary to achieve scientific objectives.
- iii. Provide appropriate veterinary care and pain management.
- iv. Ensure that housing and handling conditions minimise stress and mimic natural environments as closely as possible.

## **Types of Informed Consent**

Informed consent can be categorised into several types based on the context and nature of the research study.

### ***Written Informed Consent***

This is the most common type of informed consent. In this type, participants are provided with a written document outlining the details of the study, including its purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and their rights as participants.<sup>233</sup> Participants are required to read and sign the consent form to indicate their agreement to participate

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<sup>233</sup> Adubofour (ed.), *Research Writing Manual for Project Work & Dissertation*, 26.

voluntarily. The participant signs or thumbprints after reading the consent form and being satisfied with it.

### ***Verbal Informed Consent***

In some cases, particularly in low-risk studies or when participants may have limited literacy or access to written materials, verbal informed consent may be obtained. Researchers verbally explain the study details to participants, allowing them to ask questions and verbally indicate their agreement to participate.<sup>234</sup>

### ***Implied Informed Consent***

Implied consent may be appropriate in minimal-risk studies or observational research where participants' actions (such as completing a survey, or showing up for a scheduled interview for the study) are considered a sufficient indication of their consent to participate.<sup>235</sup> However, researchers must still provide participants with relevant information about the study and ensure they understand their rights.

### ***Assent***

Assent is obtained from individuals who may not have the legal capacity to provide informed consent, such as minors or individuals with cognitive impairments.<sup>236</sup> Whilst assent does not replace informed consent, it involves providing participants with simplified information about the study and seeking their agreement or willingness to participate, in addition to obtaining consent from a legally authorised representative.

### ***Opt-out Consent***

Opt-out consent (passive consent or presumed consent), is a form of consent used in research where participants are informed about the study and their participation unless they explicitly decline or “opt-

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<sup>234</sup> Adubofour (ed.), *Research Writing Manual for Project Work & Dissertation*, 26.

<sup>235</sup> Adubofour (ed.), *Research Writing Manual for Project Work & Dissertation*, 26.

<sup>236</sup> Adubofour (ed.), *Research Writing Manual for Project Work & Dissertation*, 26.

out.”<sup>237</sup> In opt-out consent, researchers provide information about the study to potential participants and inform them that their participation will be assumed unless they take action to decline or withdraw from the study. Opt-out consent is commonly used in low-risk research studies, such as surveys or observational studies, where obtaining individual consent from each participant may be impractical or burdensome.

### **Importance of the Informed Consent Form**

The informed consent form is of paramount importance in research for several reasons. I outline some of these reasons briefly below.

#### ***Protection of Participants***

The informed consent Form ensures that participants are fully aware of what they are consenting to and any potential risks or benefits associated with their participation.<sup>238</sup> This helps protect participants from harm and ensures that their rights and welfare are respected throughout the research process.

#### ***Ethical Standards***

Informed consent is a fundamental principle of research ethics that emphasises respect for individual autonomy and the right to make informed decisions about participating in research.<sup>239</sup> The informed consent Form documents this process, demonstrating that researchers have obtained ethical approval and adhered to ethical guidelines.

#### ***Legal Protection***

In many jurisdictions, obtaining informed consent is a legal requirement for conducting research involving human participants.<sup>240</sup> The informed consent form provides documentation that participants have consented to participate voluntarily, which can

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<sup>237</sup> Adubofour (ed.), *Research Writing Manual for Project Work & Dissertation*, 27.

<sup>238</sup> Coffelt, “Confidentiality and anonymity of Participants,” 228-230.

<sup>239</sup> Coffelt, “Confidentiality and anonymity of Participants,” 229-230.

<sup>240</sup> Coffelt, “Confidentiality and anonymity of Participants,” 230.

protect researchers from legal liability in the event of disputes or allegations of misconduct.

### ***Transparency and Trust***

Providing clear and comprehensive information to participants fosters transparency and trust in the research process.<sup>241</sup> It ensures that the purpose, procedures, and expectations of the study are openly declared/communicated. In so doing, researchers demonstrate their commitment to ethical conduct and respect for the rights of participants.

Another important subject to deal with is plagiarism. The next section takes care of it.

## **4.6 Plagiarism**

In this technologically-advanced era, various sectors of human life benefit from advancements such as enhanced healthcare delivery, improved transportation systems, communication, and trade. However, alongside these advantages, technology also presents drawbacks. One notable concern is the temptation for researchers to engage in unethical practices, such as plagiarism, facilitated by the ease of accessing and copying information from online sources. Despite the convenience, copying and pasting or modifying content obtained from the internet is unacceptable in academic research, where ethical standards must be upheld. This section focuses on discussing the ethical implications of plagiarism in research.

### **What is Plagiarism?**

To plagiarise means to steal someone's intellectual property and present it as yours. Plagiarism means the "wrongful attempt to pass off another person's literary or musical work as one's own; the act of copying without permission or acknowledgement."<sup>242</sup> In other words, plagiarism refers to the use of ideas, information, or

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<sup>241</sup> Sidse, Köhler and Szarzynsk, "Ethical Issues in Collecting Data from Informant of the Field," 102.

<sup>242</sup> Garmonsway as quoted in Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 72.

expression that does not originate from you and yet fails to give credit to the original author(s). Plagiarism poses a very serious challenge to academic institutions. It is a serious offence, constituting stealing and deceit or “a breach of trust.”<sup>243</sup> It may be either intentional or unintentional. Whether intentional or unintentional, plagiarism is a punishable offence. Plagiarism may result from carelessness, ignorance, or the desire to have a shortcut to your research.

Plagiarism may be classified as cheating, non-attribution, and patchwork writing. Cheating is a deliberate act, non-attribution is usually due to the inexperience of the researcher regarding referencing, whilst patchwork (as the name suggests) involves bringing together pieces of information from different sources without referencing these sources.

### **What Constitutes Plagiarism?**

Plagiarism occurs when a writer:

- i. Copies and pastes texts from a website or document and uses it for their work without acknowledging its source.
- ii. References an author’s exact words without quotation marks. In this case, the unfair user deceive their readers by making someone’s words appear they have been paraphrased, which is not the case.
- iii. Mentions an idea without connecting it to the source
- iv. Uses the same sentence structure as the original source and replaces some of the words. This constitutes plagiarism even if they cite the source because “the thought and expression of the thought is not original with”<sup>244</sup> him/her.
- v. Uses their ideas or words which have been published already as if they are new. This is known as **self-plagiarism**.
- vi. Paraphrases, summarises, or quotes a text without acknowledging the original author

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<sup>243</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*,

<sup>244</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 79.

- vii. Uses statistics, research, or graphics that are not common knowledge without citing the source

### **What does not Constitute Plagiarism?**

The following need not to be referenced.

First, the writer's own words, ideas, findings, evaluation of other people's thoughts, and original research need not be cited.<sup>245</sup> When the writer upon reflecting on their research comes out with new ideas or draws figures and tables from their research no referencing is needed. There is no need for referencing conclusions/summaries that contain formerly cited ideas.

Second, common knowledge does not need to be referenced.

This includes:

- i. Facts that are found in a significant number of sources. For example, Methodism was introduced in Ghana in 1835.
- ii. Observable world phenomena. For example, people drink more water during the dry season than in the rainy season.
- iii. General descriptions of social customs, and traditions. For example, Ghanaians often put on black clothing when mourning.
- iv. Popular sayings such as "two heads are better than one."

### **Why Avoid Plagiarism?**

Plagiarism must be avoided for five reasons at the very least.<sup>246</sup>

- i. Plagiarism is stealing, a sin against God and humanity.
- ii. It deprives one of the ability to think independently.
- iii. It does not help the researcher to develop problem-solving skills.
- iv. It does not encourage a proper understanding of the subject matter of research.

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<sup>245</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 79.

<sup>246</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 73, 77, 78, 80.

- v. It is a punishable offence. Its punishment may range from a warning, failure of a paper, suspension, or expulsion” from one’s institution to conviction in a law court.

### **How to Avoid Plagiarism**

The following steps can be taken to reduce the tendency to plagiarise.

- i. Ensure proper referencing of all sources used in your work by attribution (making off other people’s ideas) and documentation (indicating the source of these ideas).<sup>247</sup>
- ii. Take your time to read several times around your research topic to have a clear understanding of the subject before attempting to write your papers. One is likely to fall into the pitfall of plagiarism if they do not have enough understanding of what they are reading.
- iii. Work ahead of time so that you may not be tempted to plagiarise due to pressure.
- iv. Avoid plagiarism that results from ignorance by reading more materials dealing with the practice.
- v. Carefully take note of all the details for each source as you work so that you can compile a complete bibliography/reference list at the end of the study.

### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has shed light on the critical importance of research ethics and integrity in maintaining the credibility and validity of scholarly endeavours. When researchers keep ethical standards, they not only safeguard the rights and well-being of participants but also preserve the trust and integrity of the scientific community. Throughout the discussion, key ethical considerations such as informed consent, and confidentiality have been addressed, highlighting the ethical responsibilities inherent in every stage of the research process. Furthermore, the chapter emphasised the significance of fostering a culture of integrity and transparency,

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<sup>247</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 78

where ethical principles are not only understood but actively practised. Moving forward, the next chapter will consider the tasks of writing a critical review.

#### **4.8 Review Exercise**

1. What constitutes plagiarism in academic research, and why is it considered unethical?
2. What are the consequences of plagiarism for researchers and their academic institutions?
3. What are the fundamental principles of research ethics, and why are they important in academic inquiry?
4. How do researchers ensure informed consent from participants, and what are the ethical considerations involved?
5. How do researchers balance the benefits of research with the potential risks to participants' well-being and privacy?
6. What measures should researchers take to ensure confidentiality and anonymity when collecting and reporting research data?
7. How can researchers avoid unintentional plagiarism whilst conducting literature reviews and citing sources?
8. How do conflicts of interest arise in research, and what steps can researchers take to address them ethically?
9. How do cultural differences influence perceptions and understanding of plagiarism?
10. How can researchers navigate ethical dilemmas that may arise during the course of their research projects?
11. What strategies can researchers employ to properly attribute sources and avoid plagiarism in their writing?
12. How do plagiarism detection tools contribute to maintaining academic integrity, and what are their limitations?
13. What are the ethical implications of conducting research with vulnerable populations, such as children or marginalised communities?

14. What ethical considerations should researchers keep in mind when publishing and disseminating their findings?
15. How can academic institutions and journals promote awareness of plagiarism and educate researchers on ethical writing practices?
16. What role does proper citation and referencing play in academic writing, and how does it contribute to academic integrity?
17. How can peer review processes help identify and address potential instances of plagiarism in research manuscripts?



## CHAPTER FIVE

### WRITING A CRITICAL REVIEW

This chapter discusses the importance of critical reviews in academia, particularly in evaluating and critiquing various types of texts such as books, journal articles, or book chapters. Whilst descriptive reviews provide a summary of the text, critical reviews go further by assessing its strengths and weaknesses. The critical review involves the reader's evaluation and critique of the text they have read, offering insights into its quality, relevance, and contributions to the field. This chapter aims to provide readers with an understanding of how to effectively conduct a critical review, preparing them for this task in their academic endeavours.

#### 5.1 What is a Critical Review?

A critical review is an overall critique of a text, its argument, its use of evidence and its contribution to historical understanding. It combines fact (textual content) and critique (analysis of the content). As Smith puts it, a critical review has both descriptive and critical components.<sup>248</sup> It provides a fair evaluation of a secondary historical source so that someone who has not read the source can understand its key contributions to the study of a historical topic or period. It is a form of literary criticism in which a text is analysed based on content, style, and merit. It is usually brief, about one to two pages. A good review is expected to have one main point/thesis.

Reviewing a text requires the reviewer to think critically about the text to ascertain the author's argument and to give a critique. Therefore, no proper review can be done without an adequate understanding of the text. This requires reading the text at least twice. The first reading should help the reviewer to familiarise with the overall content of the text and to note any impressions formed. The initial impressions are then tested in the second reading,

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<sup>248</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 249.

confirmed and conclusions are drawn. As the reviewer goes through the text they must ask questions such as:

- i. What seems to be the author's main purpose or point?
- ii. Is this purpose aimed at any particular group of readers?
- iii. What information or knowledge does the text convey?
- iv. What personal or practical meaning does the text have for the reader?
- v. What are the most appropriate terms by which to evaluate the text?
- vi. How successfully did the author carry out the overall purpose(s) of the text?

It also requires the ability to comment on the text as a whole and to summarise the main content without losing meaning. A good understanding of the essential purpose and overall flow of thought of the text will go a long way to enhance the work of the reviewer. In addition to the material under review, the reviewer needs to read other related texts to enable him/her to present a fair and reasonable evaluation of the text being reviewed.

## **5.2 Why a Critical Review?**

A critical review has at least three purposes. Firstly, a critical review ensures that students develop a reading habit and at the same time acquire the skills of engaging in intellectual discussion on what they read. Secondly, it fosters independent and critical reading and thinking about historical sources. Critical review involves analytical skills that push reviewers to read and think about a text in a deeper manner, moving beyond a "book report." Thirdly, it prepares students to evaluate historical sources and arguments. Fourthly, it allows others to keep track of the latest research without necessarily having to read the entire document.

## 5.3 Components of a Critical Review

### Details of the Text

The reviewer must give bibliographic information about the text. This includes title of publication, author, publisher, place of publication, date of publication, and total number of pages in the book. The price of the book and the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) or Library of Congress Catalog (LCC) number, if listed may be added.<sup>249</sup>

### Background of the Author

The background information gives a picture of the author.<sup>250</sup> It may include data such as the author's background, qualifications, Christian affiliation, ministry position or experience, and previous publications, among other things.

### Summary of the Main Argument

The reason for summarising the purpose and key argument of the text is to provide readers with a clear understanding of what the book is about and what the author is trying to achieve. Here, the reviewer presents a summarising the content, including key themes, arguments, and major points, to help the readers grasp the main ideas and concepts presented in the book. This summary serves as a roadmap for the rest of the review, providing context for the analysis and evaluation that follows. Whilst avoiding spoilers, the reviewer should endeavour to provide enough detail to convey the content and to ensure that readers have sufficient context to understand the reviewer's perspective and assessment of the book. Some reviewers may choose to present a chapter-by-chapter or section-by-section summary. Others may prefer to focus on conveying the overall content of the book in a more concise manner.

In the case of books, information about the purpose or thesis is usually found in prefaces and/or introductions, and conclusions.

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<sup>249</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 250.

<sup>250</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 250.

For articles, the purpose can be found in the abstract. As the reviewer goes through the material, they should make conclusions as to whether the intended purpose is achieved or not. Identifying the author's intentions helps the reviewer to judge whether the author achieves them or not. The reviewer states whether the author achieves the stated purpose of the material or not. The reviewer describes how the author went about achieving his purpose and developing the thesis of the text.

### **Evaluation and Critique of the Text**

This section assesses how well the author developed the thesis of the text and whether they achieved the intended purpose of the text or not.<sup>251</sup> The reviewer must assess the book against the author's stated purpose. The review must give remarks on the strengths and limitations of the material. The review must do away with personal feelings. A book purposed to be devotional must be assessed as such and not as an academic book. Resist the temptation to digress into your subject knowledge or to suggest that the author should have written a completely different book. Do evaluate the book in terms of the validity of the author's thesis, the comprehensiveness, accuracy, and suitability with which s/he handles the evidence, and (if you can) the relationship of this work to that of others in the same field.

Support your arguments with examples from the text, but mostly put these into your own words. You might want to include a few direct quotations for important points, but keep these short and to the point, and remember to reference them accurately. You can comment on the author's style and presentation in this section.

More attention must be given to analysing and critiquing the ideas presented by the author. The reviewer must also assess the argument made and the evidence used to support the argument. Questions to consider include the following: Is the argument clearly stated? Is it clearly supported by the evidence? What kind of

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<sup>251</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 251.

evidence (sources) does the author rely on? Is this evidence comprehensive enough to support the author's argument?

The following criteria may be very useful in assessing literary works.

- i. **Clarity of purpose:** Is the purpose of the document clearly stated or implied?
- ii. **Accuracy and reliability:** Are the facts presented accurate and reliable? Are sources properly cited?
- iii. **Organisation and structure:** Is the document well-organised and structured logically?
- iv. **Depth of analysis:** Does the document provide an in-depth analysis or discussion of the topic?
- v. **Engagement with literature:** Does the author engage with relevant literature and sources?
- vi. **Critical thinking:** Does the document demonstrate critical thinking and evaluation of ideas?
- vii. **Originality and contribution:** Does the document offer original insights or contributions to the field?
- viii. **Clarity of writing:** Is the writing clear, concise, and free from jargon or unnecessary complexity?
- ix. **Appropriateness of methodology:** Are the methods used appropriate for the research question or topic?
- x. **Ethical considerations:** Are ethical considerations addressed, such as confidentiality or potential biases?
- xi. **Audience suitability:** Is the document suitable for its intended audience in terms of language, tone, and content?
- xii. **Presentation:** Are visual elements (e.g., figures, tables) used effectively to enhance understanding?
- xiii. **Overall impact:** What is the overall impact or significance of the document in its field or area of study?

Ensure that your review maintains a tone of politeness and kindness. Even when expressing disagreement with the author, try to do so in a respectful and collegial manner.<sup>252</sup> Unfortunately, some

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<sup>252</sup> Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research*, 252-253.

academic debates devolve into disrespectful exchanges, which do not align with the ethical principles in research. Scholars sometimes employ confrontational language to belittle those with differing opinions.

## **5.4 Suggested Structure of a Critical Review Paper**

### **Introduction**

An introductory paragraph identifies the work, its author and purpose, presents a statement of your evaluation of the text (thesis statement), and gives some indication of whether the author achieves the stated purpose of the study or not. A strong introduction shows a solid grasp of the issues and provides a clear outline of the scope of the review.

### **Body**

The body of the review must give a clear overview of the contents of the book, the special purpose of the audience of the book, and the reviewer's reaction and evaluation. It presents a summary of the main argument/evidence/ findings/conclusions/implications of the text. Use reporting speech (verbs) to make clear you are presenting the author's views. A statement about the place of the study in a wider field—other studies of the same genre, other studies by the same author—and an explanation of the points of similarity or difference is also given. It gives an evaluation or a critique, indicating the strengths/usefulness of the text and the weaknesses (limitations/problems) of the text. Support your critique with evidence from other literature and the text. Each of these should be presented in a paragraph.

### **Conclusion (of the Review)**

The conclusion summarises the previous discussion and restates your final judgment on the usefulness and scholarly value/contribution/importance of the text to understanding the topic (whether or not it is valuable for adding insight, and if so, why, if not, why not). Comment on the future of the issue/topic or implications

of the view expressed. A solid concluding section drawing together important points made in the essay is very necessary. Finally, provide a list of works cited in the review under the heading “References.”

## 5.5 Conclusion

Reviews should contain a brief overview of the scope and content. Reviewing each chapter or section of a study is not necessary. To sum up, any good review must evaluate the contribution of the text, set the work in a larger, broader context, identify the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments and involve the reader in the discussion. The evaluation involves discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the text. This is done effectively if the reviewer understands the content of the text, its purpose and the intended audience. This chapter ends the first part of the book. The next part considers research methodologies for various theological sub-disciplines.

## 5.6 Review Exercise

1. What are the key components of a well-written book or article review?
2. How does the tone of a review impact its effectiveness and readability?
3. What strategies can reviewers use to maintain objectivity and fairness in their reviews?
4. How should reviewers approach summarising the content of a book or article whilst avoiding spoilers?
5. What are the ethical considerations involved in writing a review, particularly when critiquing the work of others?
6. How can reviewers effectively analyse and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a book or article?
7. What role does providing context and background information play in a comprehensive review?
8. How do reviewers determine the target audience and tailor their reviews accordingly?
9. What are some common pitfalls to avoid when writing a review, and how can reviewers address them?

10. How can reviewers ensure that their reviews are constructive and contribute to scholarly discourse?



## CHAPTER SIX

### WRITING YOUR THESIS

Writing a thesis/dissertation is a significant milestone in the academic journey of a student, marking the culmination of years of research, study, and intellectual inquiry. This endeavour represents not only a scholarly achievement but also a profound opportunity for personal and professional growth. Writing a thesis requires a meticulous approach, where every word, argument, and citation contributes to the construction of a cohesive and compelling narrative. This chapter considers the intricacies of writing a thesis, exploring the key principles, strategies, and best practices essential for success.

#### 6.1 The Structure of a Thesis

There are three parts to every research thesis, namely (a) preliminaries, (2) main body, and (3) references. In this section, I outline each of these components.

##### **The Preliminary Pages**

The preliminary pages must be presented following the procedures laid down by the institution to which one belongs. Whilst this may vary from one institution to another, the following information is usually demanded: the cover page, dedication (if any), acknowledgements, table of contents, list of tables (if any), and list of figures (if any), abstract. Normally, the titles of all the items that fall under the preliminaries are written in capital letters.

**The cover page:** The title page of a research report (thesis) is usually the first page of a research paper. The cover page should contain the following elements:

- i. Title of the thesis
- ii. Name of the author
- iii. Nature of the thesis
- iv. Qualification

- v. Name of institution and department
- vi. Month and year of submission or acceptance
- vii. Name of supervisor(s)

The following are also part of the preliminary pages.

- i. **The declaration:** A research paper must include a signed declaration stating that the work is the author's. The declaration appears on a separate page. The author must sign and date it. The following is an example of a research declaration:
  - ii. I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any institution for a degree or any other award.
- iii. Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- iv. **Dedication (if any):** On this page, the researcher gives the name of the person(s) to whom they dedicate their research. One may also dedicate their work to an institution or group.
- v. **Acknowledgements (if any):** On this page, the researcher acknowledges all those who contributed to the study technically (including materials, supplies), intellectually (assistance, advice), or financially (research funding, travel grants etc.). It is a general trend for students to acknowledge God, their supervisors, lecturers, mates, family members and friends.
- vi. **Table of contents:** This is a synopsis of the structural pattern of the thesis. The table of contents contains all the main headings and important subheadings of a research in the order in which they appear in the work. All entries must have corresponding page numbers. It is helpful to have leader dots or dashes connecting the entry to the page number.
- vii. **List of tables (if any):** If the research has tables they must be shown on this page.
- viii. **List of figures (if any):** This page records all the illustrations, photographs, diagrams, maps and, graphs that may be found

in a research. Both the tables and figures have the pages on which they appear in the main work marked against them.

- ix. **List of abbreviations and acronyms (if any):** All symbols, abbreviations and technical terms in the thesis should be listed on this page and their full interpretations, and the units where appropriate given.

### ***Abstract and Keywords***

#### **Abstract of a Thesis**

The abstract of a thesis serves as a concise summary that encapsulates the key elements of the research, providing a snapshot of its purpose, methods, findings, and implications. As such, it serves as a microcosm of the research. It is typically the first section read by potential readers, making it crucial for capturing the essence of the thesis effectively. The following are important notes about the abstract. Firstly, the abstract should clearly state the overarching purpose or objective of the thesis. This includes identifying the research question or problem addressed and why it is significant within the broader field of study.

Secondly, it should outline the methodology employed to investigate the research question. This involves briefly describing the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques used to gather and analyse information. The abstract should convey enough detail to indicate the rigor and appropriateness of the methodology without delving into excessive technicalities.

Next, the abstract should summarise the main findings or outcomes of the research. This includes highlighting key results, discoveries, or conclusions reached through the study. It should give readers a sense of the new knowledge contributed by the thesis and how it advances understanding or addresses gaps in the field.

Furthermore, the abstract should touch upon the broader implications or significance of the findings. This may include discussing potential applications, theoretical implications, or practical outcomes resulting from the research. It should convey why

the findings matter and how they contribute to the advancement of knowledge or practice in the relevant area.

Finally, the abstract should be written in clear, concise language that is accessible to a diverse audience. It should avoid jargon and technical terms that may obscure meaning for readers unfamiliar with the specific field. A well-crafted abstract not only summarises the thesis effectively but also entices readers to delve deeper into the full text for a more detailed exploration of the research.

Ideally, an abstract must not be more than a page. I recommend an abstract length between one hundred and fifty (150) and two hundred and fifty (250) words, typewritten and double-spaced.

### **Sample Abstract I<sup>253</sup>**

This study explores the relationship between God's sovereignty and human free will (responsibility) in relation to God's plan of salvation. Several seemingly irreconcilable paradoxes in Scripture puzzle the mind, some of which have to do with salvation. One of the most important of these is the sovereignty of God and the free will of humans. Both are taught by Scripture, yet they seem to be unable to co-exist. The qualitative research method was used to investigate the issue. Some selected African scholars were interviewed and their views were critically analysed alongside views from other scholars. In so doing, the discussion was set within the African context.

The study found that, over the years, the debate has been done either by elevating God's sovereignty over and above human free will or by elevating human free will over and against God's sovereignty. The consequence of such approaches is to deny one side of the issue. These extremes are biblically unbalanced, theologically unhealthy, and practically undesirable. In order to deal with the problem inherent in the existing approaches to the issues, the study

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<sup>253</sup> This example was taken from Boaheng, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in God's Plan of Salvation*, vii.

suggests that extreme positions which (1) elevate God's sovereignty above human freedom or (2) elevate human freedom above God's sovereignty must be avoided in the dealing with the issue. Discussions on the doctrine of salvation must begin with God and not humankind because salvation is God's gift and not from works. Even though God ordains all things and all events, human beings are fully accountable for the outcome of their decisions.

### **Sample Abstract II<sup>254</sup>**

Christianity, like any other religion, cannot thrive successfully in any human society unless it is given a contextual expression. Therefore, the contextualisation of the Christian gospel is indispensable to the planting and survival of Christianity in a given environment. In the Akan community of Ghana, the lack of effective contextualisation of atonement theology has led to a situation whereby many Christians habitually consult traditional powers to satisfy their quest for power, fame, wealth, longevity, and protection, among others. This literature-based research, therefore, was undertaken to explore how a theology of atonement from an Akan cultural perspective might bring about religious and ethical renewal to Akan Christians and hence empower them to rely solely on Christ's atonement for all their physical and spiritual needs.

The general introduction to the seven-chapter thesis was followed by a socio-historical survey of key theories of atonement that have emerged since the birth of the Church. Next, exegetical analyses of selected biblical texts, including Leviticus 16:1-28; Psalm 51:1-12; Isaiah 52:13—53:12; Mark 14:10-26; Romans 3:21-26; 5:1-21 and Hebrews 9:11-14, were conducted to place the study in the biblical context. This was followed by an examination of atonement in the Akan religious, social-economic and political contexts.

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<sup>254</sup> This example was taken from Boaheng, *A contextual theology of atonement for the Akan society of Ghana*, xix.

Using the historical, biblical and Akan primal backgrounds of atonement as contextual frameworks, an Akan Christian theology of atonement was formulated based on key thematic areas such as *Nyame-Kra-teasefoɔ* Christology, *Ntamgyinafokann* Christology, *Afɔdepreko* Christology, *Bɔne-ano-aduro* Christology, *Nkunimdie* Christology, *Ahobammɔ* Christology, *Duadaneɛ* Christology, *Yiedie* Christology and *Ayaresa-ne-ahofadie* Christology, among others. The findings from the study led to the conclusion that to be meaningful and relevant to the ordinary Akan, Akan Christian soteriology must not only touch on liberation from sin but also on the liberation from social, political, economic, and health challenges facing the Akan community. The atonement theology espoused in this study not only offers an antidote to Akan Christians' habitual consultation of traditional sources for solutions to their existential challenges but also serves to foster improved divine-human, human-human and human-environment relations.

### **Keywords**

Keywords in a thesis are crucial for highlighting the main topics, themes, and concepts of the research. Typically, keywords are listed after the abstract and should be chosen carefully to maximise the accessibility and impact of your research. They significantly enhance the searchability of the work in academic databases, making it easier for other researchers to locate relevant studies. Keywords also play an important role in indexing, ensuring that your thesis or article is accurately categorised within academic repositories.

Choosing the right keywords involves identifying the main concepts of your research and selecting terms that precisely reflect these topics. It is important to use specific terms and consider potential synonyms or related terms that other researchers might use in their searches. It is also essential to adhere to any specific guidelines provided by the institution to which the work will be submitted. For example, in a theology thesis titled "The Role of Liberation Theology in Modern Social Justice Movements," appropriate keywords might include "liberation theology," "social

justice,” “modern theology,” “church and society,” and “theological ethics.”

### **The Main Body of the Thesis**

This consists of a detailed report of the research. Traditionally, the main body of a research report contains five or six chapters.

- i. Chapter 1 – General Introduction
- ii. Chapter 2 - Appropriate title (eg. Literature Review, Historical Context, Theoretical Framework)
- iii. Chapter 3 –Appropriate title (eg. Methodology, Exegetical Study)
- iv. Chapter 4 –Appropriate title (eg. Results and Discussion)
- v. Insert other chapter(s) with appropriate title(s)
- vi. Chapter n<sup>255</sup> – Conclusion and Recommendations

### **Bibliography and Appendices**

#### ***References/Bibliography***

A bibliography is a list of sources (such as books, articles, websites, and other materials) that have been consulted or cited in a piece of writing or research project. It serves as a comprehensive record of the sources used to inform and support the content of the work, allowing readers to locate and verify the information referenced by the author.

Here are some tips on presenting a bibliography effectively.

- i. List only publications directly cited in the paper (unless your institution requires otherwise)
- ii. Arrange your bibliography entries alphabetically by the author’s last name. If no author is available, use the title of the source instead.
- iii. Ensure that your bibliography follows a consistent formatting style throughout. Whether you are using the MLA, APA, Chicago, or another citation style, adhere to its guidelines for font, spacing, indentation, and punctuation.

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<sup>255</sup> This represents the last chapter of the research work.

- iv. In most citation styles, each line after the first in a bibliography entry should be indented. This is called a hanging indent.<sup>256</sup> Make sure to apply this formatting consistently.
- v. Provide complete and accurate bibliographic information for each source, including the author's name(s), the title of the work, publication date, publisher, and page numbers. For electronic sources, include the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) or Uniform Resource Locator (URL).
- vi. In many citation styles, titles of longer works such as books, journals (not the title of the article), and websites should be italicised. Titles of shorter works such as articles, essays, and poems should be enclosed in quotation marks. Check the style used by your institution and adhere to it.
- vii. Some institutions require their students to organise the sources into types (e.g., books, articles, websites, etc). One has to find out what their institution requires.
- viii. Double-check all bibliographic information for accuracy, including author names, publication dates, and page numbers. Inaccurate citations can undermine the credibility of your work.
- ix. Refer to the specific guidelines of the citation style you are using (e.g., MLA, APA) for formatting your bibliography. Each style has its own rules and conventions, so it is essential to follow them closely.
- x. Before finalising your bibliography, proofread it carefully to catch any errors or inconsistencies. Pay attention to spelling, punctuation, and formatting to ensure a polished presentation.

### *Appendices*

The appendix is the last part of the research report. It consists of all materials that are related to the report and which may be referred to

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<sup>256</sup> See the first three entries of the bibliography of this book (and others) for examples.

for greater details but which are not suitable for inclusion in the main body of the report. Such materials include:

- i. The questionnaire used for data collection,
- ii. Letters written to and received from respondents and authorities,
- iii. Comprehensive mark sheets,
- iv. Collection of photographs,
- v. Collections of tables and maps, etc.

Here are some tips on adding an appendix to a research paper.

1. Ensure that the content you include in the appendix directly supports or enhances the understanding of your research paper. This can include supplementary data, additional information, detailed methodology descriptions, survey instruments, or any other material that is relevant but not essential to the main text.
2. Organise the contents of the appendix logically and coherently. You may choose to divide the appendix into sections or subsections based on the nature of the material. Number or label each appendix item for easy reference in the main text.
3. Clearly label each appendix item with a descriptive title or heading that indicates its contents. This helps readers quickly identify the relevance of each item and locate specific information within the appendix.
4. Maintain consistency in formatting throughout the appendix. Use the same font, font size, spacing, and indentation as the main text of your research paper. Ensure that any tables, figures, or other visual elements are clearly formatted and labelled according to your chosen style guide.
5. If you reference specific items in the appendix within the main text of your research paper, provide clear cross-references to help readers locate the relevant material. Use in-text citations or footnotes to indicate where additional information can be found in the appendix.

6. Include any supplementary materials, such as raw data, transcripts, questionnaires, or interview transcripts, that are too detailed or extensive to be included in the main text of your research paper. Provide sufficient context or explanation to help readers interpret and understand the supplementary materials.
7. Decide on the appropriate placement of the appendix within your research paper. Appendices are typically placed after the main body of the paper, before the references or bibliography section. Consult your instructor or style guide for specific guidelines on appendix placement.
8. Before finalising your research paper, review the appendix to ensure that all included materials are relevant, clearly presented, and effectively supporting the main text. Remove any extraneous or redundant information that does not contribute to the understanding of your research.

## **6.2 Introducing and Concluding a Chapter**

### **Introducing a Chapter**

A well-crafted introduction serves as a vital roadmap for the reader, and provides a clear direction for your argument. Chapter introductions play a crucial role in guiding the reader through the content and purpose of each individual chapter. They serve as orientation tools, providing an overview of the chapter's main themes, objectives, methodology, and argumentative structure. Additionally, they may include any pertinent background information or context necessary for understanding the chapter's content. The chapter introduction also connects the present chapter to the previous one. It must be brief and grab the reader's attention, stating what the chapter is about and how it sets out to achieve its purpose. By fulfilling these functions, chapter introductions effectively prepare the reader for the material they are about to encounter, facilitating comprehension and engagement with the text. Here are two examples.

### **Example One**

In chapter one, we discussed the general introduction to the study. In this chapter, the study focuses on the background and context of the Beatitudes. This includes such issues as the historical and political settings of Rome in the first century, authorship, the purpose of writing the pericope, the audience, and the literary context of the text.

#### ***Comment***

In this example, the writer connects the present chapter with the previous one. He then gives the purpose of the present chapter and enumerates some of the issues that will be explored.

### **Example Two**

The previous chapter discussed two major approaches to the issues of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. The first approach elevates human responsibility in such a way that God's sovereignty is virtually lost sight of. The second approach elevates God's sovereignty above human responsibility, making human beings seem to have no role to play in their salvation. In this chapter, data collected on the research topic are analysed and discussed. The analysis is done by examining the various opinions expressed by the scholars interviewed, and the outcomes of the focus group discussion. These views are discussed in relation to the secondary data gathered from scholarly writings of various theologians and philosophers.

#### ***Comment***

In the second example, the writer begins the introduction by giving a summary of the previous chapter. He then moves on to state the purpose of the present chapter and to state how this purpose will be obtained.

### ***Guidelines for Crafting Introductions***

The following guidelines may be helpful.

- i. Ensure the introduction is clear and concise.

- ii. State the chapter's main focus, objectives, and argument.
- iii. Emphasise the relevance of the chapter's topic within the broader context of the work.
- iv. Provide a brief overview of the chapter's structure, indicating how the content will be organised.
- v. Offer necessary background information or context to orient readers unfamiliar with the subject matter.
- vi. Recap key points from previous chapters and explain their relevance to the current chapter, if applicable.
- vii. Outline the methodology or approach used to investigate the chapter's topic, if applicable.
- viii. Maintain a professional tone and use appropriate academic language throughout the introduction.

### **Concluding a Chapter**

The conclusion to a chapter encapsulates the chapter's main points, connects them to the overall thesis, and paves the way for the subsequent sections, ensuring a coherent and logical progression of ideas throughout the document. The example below is worth reading.

### **Example**

In this chapter, we came across a certain group of theologians, who in their anxiety to maintain human responsibility, have magnified it beyond all due proportions, until God's sovereignty is virtually lost sight of, and in a few instances flatly denied. Others, as we noted, have acknowledged that the Scriptures present both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of humans, but affirm that in humans' present finite condition and with human limited knowledge it is impossible to reconcile the two truths, though it is the duty of the believer to receive both. In the next chapter, we consider the African perspective on divine sovereignty.

### ***Guidelines for Crafting Conclusions***

These points may serve to guide researchers.

- i. Summarise the main points, highlighting their significance within the broader context of the work
- ii. Reiterate the chapter's objective or purpose and summarise how it has been achieved.
- iii. Reflect on the findings and outline their implications and relevance.
- iv. Link to the next chapter, if applicable, to maintain continuity and flow.

### **6.3 Presenting, Discussing, Analysing and Interpreting Data**

Empirical research requires the researcher to present the field data and to analyse and make conclusions. The following guide is recommended.<sup>257</sup>

#### ***Guidelines for Presenting/Analysing Data***

The data presented for analysis must be relevant. The researcher has to ensure that the original research objectives guide the inclusion of data in your analysis. The researcher is required to maintain focus and coherence of thought by excluding irrelevant data. When this is done the rationale behind the selection needs to be explained to demonstrate critical thinking and academic rigor.

In terms of analysis, one has to use methods suitable to the data type and research aims. The method chosen needs to be justified. The researcher should aim to uncover significant patterns and trends in the data meaningfully. For quantitative work, one may conduct rigorous statistical analysis to draw generalisable conclusions beyond the sample, adhering to the scientific method inherent in the natural sciences, whilst for qualitative work one may conduct a thorough analysis of non-numerical data, employing methods such as thematic coding or discourse analysis to uncover deeper, transferable knowledge.

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<sup>257</sup> The issues outlined here have been discussed in section 3.7. What I present here serves to complement what I presented in that section.

The researcher needs to maintain thoroughness in data analysis by critically engaging with all data intended to support academic positions, acknowledging both limitations and strengths to uphold academic credibility. Presentational devices, such as charts, graphs, and tables, may be used to represent data intelligibly, ensuring clarity and accessibility for readers. Relevant but cumbersome data may be presented in an appendix for clarity, with only essential information included in the main text.

The foregoing is supported by and further illuminated by the following. Under “results” the researcher is expected to:

- i. Summarise main results/findings using tables, figures, or text
- ii. Identify stronger and weaker results
- iii. Comment on whether the research hypothesis is supported or not.

### ***Guidelines for Interpreting/Discussing Data***

During the discussion, the researcher needs to identify trends, patterns, and themes within the data. In the process, there is the need to consider theoretical interpretations and discuss anomalies and consistencies, supported by representative quotes from interviews, if applicable.

One has to clearly state the findings, and support them by tightly argued reasoning and empirical evidence. One also has to relate the findings and discussions to existing literature, compare and contrast with other academic work, and explicitly link them to the research questions and the themes identified in the literature review (for coherence and alignment). The following points are noteworthy.

- i. Explain and interpret the results
- ii. Evaluate how the results fit in with the previous findings – do they contradict, qualify, agree with, or go beyond them?
- iii. Point out agreement/discrepancies with previous studies (previous chapters)
- iv. Comment on whether the result is expected or not expected
- v. Suggest an explanation for a surprising result
- vi. Discuss the implications of the results.

## **6.4 Concluding the Entire Thesis**

The concluding chapter of the thesis is a very important chapter. It normally comprises these sections: “Summary,” “Conclusions” and “Recommendations.” The assessment of the hypothesis may or may not be required.

### **Summary of the Thesis**

Provide a concise overview of your research objectives, methodology, and key findings. Summarise the main points covered in previous chapters to contextualise the conclusions and recommendations. Discuss the overall findings in relation to the research aims. This helps to test whether or not the research aims have been achieved.

### **Assessment of the Research Hypothesis**

This task critical task involves evaluating whether the research findings support or refute the initial hypothesis. This process requires a systematic approach to ensure that conclusions are drawn based on empirical evidence and sound reasoning. The following guidelines may be helpful.

- i. Begin by clearly restating the research hypothesis. This helps to refocus the reader's attention on the central question or proposition that guided the research.
- ii. Compare the summarised findings with the original hypothesis. Discuss whether the results align with the expectations set out in the hypothesis or if they deviate. Use specific examples from the data to illustrate these points.
- iii. Evaluate any alternative explanations for the findings. Discuss any potential variables or factors that might have influenced the results and how they relate to the hypothesis.
- iv. Address the limitations of the research that may affect the assessment of the hypothesis. Discuss any constraints in the methodology, data collection, or analysis that should be considered when interpreting the results.

## **General Conclusions**

Under “conclusions”:

- i. Emphasise the importance of your subject by placing it in a larger context. This is done by drawing attention to the reasons for which you wrote your paper on this subject and stating the significance of your argument by relating it to these larger areas of inquiry. Show how your argument might advance knowledge in a discipline, take a position in a larger debate, or provide solutions to a problem.
- ii. Do not introduce new materials in the conclusion. If any new idea comes to mind during the writing of the conclusion quickly develop that point in the body and only mention it in the conclusion.
- iii. Do not weaken your position by apologising for what you have already stated.

## **Recommendations/Suggestions for Further Research**

Recommendations/suggestions for further research come in the last chapter of the thesis. They should provide a roadmap for future research, suggesting directions and methods that can build on the findings of your study. Therefore, they need to be clear, specific, and actionable. Here are some guiding principles for doing this.

- i. Avoid undermining your work; instead, offer suggestions on how future studies can build upon it, ensure that your research stands alone on its own merits, and use recommendations as a natural extension point for your work.
- ii. Clearly articulate specific recommendations, rather than vague or general suggestions.
- iii. Focus on particular aspects, variables, or methods that future research should explore.
- iv. Highlight areas where your research has revealed gaps or limitations, suggesting opportunities for future investigation.
- v. Pose specific, unanswered questions or hypotheses that arise from your findings, providing a starting point for future research.

- vi. Recommend alternative methodologies, approaches, or techniques that could enhance or complement your existing research.

## **6.5 Crafting Chapter Headings and Subheadings**

In theses/dissertations, chapters or major sections are divided into parts (sections). The sections can be further divided into smaller subsections (subheadings). More specifically, these are known as first, second, and third-level subheadings. The headings and subheadings delineate the organisation of the thesis for both the writer and the reader. These headings are formatted in a way that makes automatic generation of the table of contents easier.

Headings and subheadings play a crucial role in the organisation and clarity of a thesis. Firstly, they provide a clear organisational structure, breaking down the text into manageable sections and facilitating easy navigation for readers. Secondly, they give readers a sense of what to expect and enhancing comprehension while reducing ambiguity. Additionally, headings and subheadings help readers who are skimming for specific information. Finally, they contribute to the logical flow of ideas, guiding readers through the progression of arguments and ensuring coherence between sections. Unless, your supervisor or institution says otherwise, the format of the primary, or first-level, subheadings should be more prominent than that of lower-level (second, third, etc.) subheadings. Generally, centred headings attract more attention than side headings. Underlined<sup>258</sup> or boldface headings, whether centred or side, are also more noticeable, whereas headings that are neither underlined nor boldface draw less attention. Combining underlining and boldface in the same heading is not acceptable.

The following examples illustrate a clear, organised hierarchy. The chapter heading introduces the main topic, while the first-level subheadings break it down into more specific areas. Second-level subheadings provide further detail.

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<sup>258</sup> This is not normally used in thesis writing.

## **Chapter Heading**

Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Methodology

### **Subheading Level 1**

1.1 Overview of Research Methods

#### **Subheading Level 2**

1.1.1 Quantitative Research Techniques

1.1.2 Qualitative Research Techniques

Keep this in mind. Avoid vague terms and opt for specific language that clearly conveys the main point or focus of each section. Maintain parallel structure in your headings and subheadings to create a cohesive and professional appearance. Consistency in grammatical structure ensures that your headings align logically and visually. Keep your headings and subheadings concise yet informative, striking a balance between clarity and brevity to avoid overwhelming the reader. Use a clear hierarchy to distinguish between different levels of headings, with major sections having more prominent headings and subsections denoted by subheadings of varying levels. Also, ensure consistency in formatting and labeling throughout your thesis to reinforce the structure and maintain a polished appearance. It is important to ensure that chapter titles directly correlate with the chapter's content, accurately reflecting its main ideas or unfolding events. For non-empirical research, one may easily treat each subsidiary question in a chapter. In that case, each chapter title is developed from a question. I have illustrated this in the example below.<sup>259</sup>

The topic is “A Study of the Development of the Cell Church Concept in Lusaka, Zambia” and the main question is “How might we formulate a practical theology to improve the development of the Cell Church concept in Lusaka, Zambia?” The subsidiary questions are: (i). What are the theological foundations and traditions influencing the adoption and development of the Cell Church concept

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<sup>259</sup> Note that the first and last chapters are almost always constant, regardless of the other chapters.

in Lusaka? (ii). What current social, cultural, and religious landscape informs the development of the Cell Church in Lusaka? (iii). What is the correlation between the theological traditions and contextual realities regarding the development of the cell church in Lusaka? (iv). Based on the research outcomes, what practical theological theories or strategies can be proposed to enhance the development and sustainability of the Cell Church concept in Lusaka?

Based on the above information, one may have the following chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction (This chapter provides an overview of the research topic, introduces the main research question and subsidiary research questions, and outlines the structure of the thesis).

Chapter 2: Theological Foundations of the Cell Church Concept in Lusaka (This chapter deals with the theological underpinnings and historical traditions that have influenced the adoption and development of the Cell Church concept in Lusaka, examining how theological perspectives shape the implementation of this model).

Chapter 3: Socio-Cultural and Religious Landscape of Lusaka and its Influence on the Cell Church (This chapter investigates the current social, cultural, and religious landscape of Lusaka, Zambia, and how these factors impact the development and functioning of Cell Churches in the region).

Chapter 4: Correlation between Theological Traditions and Contextual Realities (This chapter examines the relationship between theological traditions and contextual realities in Lusaka, analysing how theological beliefs intersect with local cultural practices and societal norms within the context of the Cell Church).

Chapter 5: Practical Theological Theories and Strategies for Enhancing the Cell Church in Lusaka (Based on the findings from the previous chapters, this chapter proposes practical theological theories and strategies

aimed at improving the development, growth, and sustainability of Cell Churches in Lusaka, providing actionable recommendations for church leaders and practitioners).

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations (This chapter summarises the key findings of the study, restates the main research question and subsidiary research questions, and offers concluding reflections on the implications of the research for practical theology and the future of the Cell Church concept in Lusaka. It also provides recommendations for further research and practical application).

## **6.6 Developing Body Paragraphs**

Whilst body paragraphs can be developed in many ways, each paragraph must focus on a single idea. Begin, advance, or end paragraphs with topic sentences. In most cases, the topic sentence or main idea appears first in the paragraph to introduce the reader to the main idea contained in that paragraph and to connect the present paragraph to the previous one. The topic sentence describes the claim or point of the paragraph, thus orienting the reader to the purpose of the paragraph.

The topic sentence may also appear in the middle or at the end of the paragraph. Thus the writer makes a claim, backs it with reasons, supports it with evidence, acknowledges and responds to other views, and sometimes explains the principles of reasoning. The topic sentence is supported by additional points (or ideas that advance the main point of the paragraph), details, and explanations, often presented in sandwiches, explaining why/how the details support the topic sentence, and thus the thesis. Therefore, the sentence(s) linking the topic sentence often further describe the main idea of the paragraph. External materials may be interpreted and/or analysed to give support to the main idea. It must be clear how the source material supports the main idea.

Unless the topic sentence appears at the end, the paragraph should conclude with a sentence (preferably the writer's idea) that reviews the body paragraph, emphasises the point and/or thesis again, or prepares the reader for the next body paragraph. The foregoing can be summed up in the following techniques:

- i. State the main idea or topic sentence (at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end)
- ii. Illustrate your idea with examples
- iii. Give an authoritative quotation
- iv. Anticipate and respond to counterarguments
- v. Back your ideas with more evidence
- vi. Offer another perspective on the idea
- vii. Brainstorm more insights about the idea
- viii. Elaborate on causes/effects, definitions, comparison/contrasts

Here are examples to illustrate the above points.

**Example 1: Well-Written Paragraph**

The doctrine of the Trinity has been a cornerstone of Christian theology since its formal articulation in the early centuries of the Church. Rooted in biblical texts and elaborated through theological reflection, the Trinity affirms the existence of one God in three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who are co-equal and co-eternal. This understanding not only underscores the unity and diversity within God's nature but also enriches Christian understanding of salvation history and the relationship between God and humanity. Through centuries of theological debate and ecumenical councils, the Trinity has remained central to Christian identity, shaping worship, doctrine, and spirituality across various denominational traditions.

***Comment***

This paragraph is well-written because it clearly defines the theological issue (the doctrine of the Trinity), provides a brief historical context of its development, explains its significance to

Christian theology and practice, and maintains clarity and coherence throughout. It uses precise language and organises information logically, making it accessible to readers with varying levels of theological knowledge.

**Example 2: Poorly-Written Paragraph:**

The Trinity is a Christian belief about God being three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is a big deal because it is been around since early Christianity and helps explain God’s nature. The Trinity affects how Christians worship and think about God. It was decided at church meetings a long time ago that God is like this, and it is been a part of Christian churches ever since.

*Comment*

This paragraph is poorly-written because it lacks depth and clarity. It provides minimal explanation of the theological issue (the Trinity), offering only basic information without elaborating on its biblical basis, historical development, or theological implications. The language is vague and lacks precision, using colloquial expressions (“It is a big deal”) that do not convey the gravity or complexity of the topic. The paragraph also lacks coherence and structure, making it difficult for readers to follow the flow of ideas or understand the significance of the Trinity in Christian theology.

**6.7 Working Under a Research Supervisor**

**What is Research Supervision?**

Thesis writing takes place under the guidance of a scholar in the relevant academic field, ensuring that students do not undertake this significant journey alone. The student is accompanied by at least one companion, referred to as the supervisor, who supports and guides them from the beginning to the end of the process. Supervisors are carefully selected by institutions based on their expertise and knowledge about the topic under study, ensuring they can provide the necessary support and direction.

Research supervision refers to the process in which an experienced academic, known as a supervisor, provides guidance and support to a student or junior researcher throughout their research project. This relationship is critical in academic settings, particularly at the postgraduate level, and plays a key role in the development of the researcher's skills, knowledge, and academic growth.

During the admission process, applicants are typically required to attach a short research concept to their application. This concept allows the institution to assess whether it has the appropriate human resources—specifically, supervisors available and qualified to oversee the proposed project. This step is crucial because the availability of a suitable supervisor is a determining factor in the admission decision. If the institution does not have a capable supervisor for the applicant's research topic, the application may be denied. This careful selection process ensures that students receive the guidance they need to successfully complete their thesis.

When selecting a supervisor for a thesis or dissertation, several key qualifications are essential to ensure effective guidance and support. Ideally, the supervisor should possess advanced academic credentials and have expertise and specialisation in the relevant subject area. The supervisor ought to have deep knowledge and expertise in the specific area of study relevant to the students they will supervise. This expertise is often demonstrated through a strong research track record and publications in reputable journals. Experience in teaching and mentoring is also important, as it helps the supervisor communicate complex ideas and provide constructive feedback.

In addition, the prospective supervisor(s) should be readily available to meet regularly and offer timely feedback, with a schedule that allows them to commit sufficient time to the student's progress. Therefore, one may not be appointed to supervise if they have the required expertise but do not have enough time to accompany the student on the research journey. Familiarity with various research methodologies is also crucial, as is knowledge of institutional policies and procedures. Institutions consider these qualifications to

pair students with supervisors equipped to help to navigate the complexities of research and lead to successful thesis or dissertation completion.

### **Co-Supervision**

Co-supervision refers to a situation where a student is guided by two or more supervisors. One may say that co-supervision may delay the student's work when the supervisor disagrees on issues and is not able to resolve them fast. On the other hand, co-supervision offers several benefits for both the student and the supervisors, a few of which are outlined briefly below.

#### ***Advantages for the Student***

- i. **More support:** Having multiple supervisors gives students access to a wider range of expertise and support, reducing the limitations of relying on just one supervisor.
- ii. **Diverse perspectives:** Co-supervisors bring different backgrounds and opinions to the project, enriching discussions and bringing fresh ideas.
- iii. **Valuable feedback:** Co-supervisors provide helpful feedback and suggestions throughout the research process, contributing to the project's development.
- iv. **Continuity:** If one supervisor is unavailable, having co-supervisors ensures that guidance continues without interruptions.

#### ***Advantages for the Supervisors***

- i. **Varied expertise:** In interdisciplinary studies, co-supervisors offer complementary expertise, enriching the research with diverse perspectives.
- ii. **Critical analysis:** Co-supervisors can challenge assumptions and provide constructive criticism, ensuring the research maintains quality and rigor.

- iii. **Deep exploration:** Debates between co-supervisors lead to deeper exploration of ideas and methodologies, strengthening the research.
- iv. **Learning opportunities:** Co-supervisors learn from each other, improving their own skills and knowledge in research supervision.

### **Ingredients for Effective Supervision**

This section outlines fundamental aspects of research supervision, from its intensive teaching nature to the collaborative partnership between supervisors and students.

- i. **Research supervision involves intensive teaching.** It is more than guiding students through their research projects. Supervisors give instructions, feedback, and support from start to finish, including teaching research methodologies, critical thinking, and writing skills.
- ii. **Effective research supervision is a partnership.** It is not one-sided, where the supervisor dictates tasks. Instead, it is a collaboration built on mutual respect, trust, and cooperation. The supervisor does not impose his ideas on the student. Rather, the supervisor builds consensus with the student. Both the supervisor and the student work together towards common goals, with the supervisor providing guidance and mentorship while the student takes ownership of their project.
- iii. **Attitudes matter in research supervision.** Patience, empathy, respect, and open-mindedness are crucial. Supervisors need to understand their students' needs and communication styles to support them effectively.
- iv. **Research supervision includes administrative tasks** like managing timelines, coordinating meetings, and securing funding. While these tasks may seem mundane, they are essential for the smooth progression of the project and the success of the supervisory relationship.

## Qualities of a Good Supervisor

As noted earlier, in academia, supervisors play a pivotal role in guiding students through their educational journey. A good supervisor possesses essential qualities that foster a supportive and productive relationship with their students. From accessibility and approachability to encouragement and professionalism, these qualities are vital for student success. In this section, I outline the key traits that define a good supervisor and their impact on student development.

- i. **Available:** A good supervisor is easy to reach and makes time for meetings with students, both one-on-one and in groups.
- ii. **Friendly:** They create a welcoming environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and sharing concerns without feeling judged.
- iii. **Supportive:** Good supervisors offer encouragement and guidance to help students overcome challenges and stay focused on their goals.
- iv. **Interested:** They take the time to understand each student's strengths, weaknesses, interests, and aspirations, building a strong mentor-student relationship.
- v. **Flexible:** Effective supervisors communicate openly and adapt their approach to meet the individual needs of each student.
- vi. **Professional:** They help students integrate into their academic program by facilitating networking opportunities and connecting them with professionals in their field.
- vii. **Helpful:** Beyond academics, good supervisors assist students with professional development, helping them build skills and networks for future success.

## The Role of the Supervisor

Understanding what to expect from your research supervisor is crucial for a successful academic journey. In most institutions, the relationship between supervisor and supervisee (the student/researcher) is well-documented and made available to

students even before they begin their research. Here are some of the responsibilities/roles of the supervisor.<sup>260</sup>

1. **Guidance:** A supervisor provides direction on structuring research work, advising on methodology, and ensuring the research stays on track. They offer feedback on chapter drafts, outlines, and other written materials. Producing these materials is essential for effective supervision, as supervisors respond to the work and questions presented. Given their busy schedules, supervisors may take some time to provide feedback, so it is advisable to work on other aspects of the project in the meantime. For longer pieces, such as a complete thesis draft, it is crucial to inform the supervisor in advance to allow adequate time for review.
2. **Meeting with student to discuss matters related to the thesis:** Regular supervision sessions should be planned mutually. Between sessions, supervisors should be accessible during office hours and via email or phone. Both parties should communicate their availability, especially during extended absences due to fieldwork or conferences.
3. **Provision of academic support:** A good supervisor provides not only academic guidance but also a supportive and open relationship. They should be approachable and willing to offer constructive feedback and encouragement throughout the research process. They encourage students to attend at appropriate conferences, colloquia, seminars, and workshops.
4. **Post-submission support:** After the successful submission of the thesis, supervisors advise on publishing the research, write references for job applications, and provide guidance on job opportunities.

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<sup>260</sup> The following has been taken (with modifications) from Gina Wisker, *The Postgraduate Research Handbook* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 36-38. These points are further expanded in the supervisor-student agreement below.

Students should not expect the following from their supervisors.

1. **Take complete responsibility for the thesis:** Supervisors are not responsible for the final product. The student must take full responsibility for the thesis.
2. **Imposition of research interests:** Supervisors are not to impose their own research interests on students. Whilst advice should be considered, the project should remain the student's own work.
3. **Doing the work for the student:** Supervisors cannot be expected to do the work for the student. This includes writing chapters, or even parts of chapters. Writing the thesis (full or part) for the student is unethical and punishable. It is, however, allowed for supervisors to suggest the insertion of words, phrases, or sentences to improve the quality of the work. Such insertions are tracked and the student is asked to consider accepting them or to consider inserting alternatives to improve the work. This is not the same as the first case where the supervisor writes a substantial amount of the thesis for the student.
4. **Proofreading and correcting spelling/grammar:** Supervisors are not responsible for proofreading work or correcting spelling and grammar errors. This does not mean they will not point out grammatical issues. They will. But that is not their primary supervisory task. It is, therefore, important for the student to proofread their work thoroughly and to seek assistance when necessary. At the University of the Free State, South Africa, students are asked to seek the service of a professional editor and attach a certificate indicating that their work has been proofread/edited to make it free from grammatical errors. Unless this certificate is attached to the final work, it cannot be accepted.<sup>261</sup> In short,

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<sup>261</sup> For a sample of this certificate see Boaheng, *A Contextual Theology of Atonement for the Akan Community of Ghana*, 324.

the supervisor is not a proofreader, an editor or a copy-editor of your work.

5. **Control of the project:** Supervisors guide but do not control the project. They allow their students to work at their own pace under guidance. This helps the student to maintain ownership and independence.

### **Supervisor-Student Agreement**

A supervisor-student agreement (or memorandum of understanding [MoU]) is a formal document that outlines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both the thesis supervisor (often a faculty member or academic advisor) and the student (typically a graduate or postgraduate student) during the course of a research project, such as a thesis/dissertation. This agreement serves as a contractual or procedural framework that defines the terms under which the supervision will take place. The agreement has the following importance.

- i. The agreement clarifies roles for supervisor and student, ensuring clear responsibilities and expectations.
- ii. It establishes regular meetings and updates for consistent dialogue and issue resolution.
- iii. It defines milestones to ensure both the supervisor and student meet deadlines and stay on track with progress.
- iv. It ensures that research aligns with ethical standards and institutional guidelines.
- v. It guides constructive resolution of disagreements, maintaining professionalism throughout the thesis process.
- vi. It creates a formal record and hence, prevents misunderstandings between supervisor and student.

### **Sample Supervisor-Student Agreement**

The following has been crafted to guide supervisors and institutions. It should be modified to address contextual realities and needs.

**Student's Name:** [Student's Full Name]

**Student ID:** [Student's ID Number]

**Program:** [Program Name]

**Thesis Title:** [Title of Thesis]

**Supervisor's Name:** [Supervisor's Full Name]

**Department:** [Department Name]

**Institution:** [Institution Name]

## **Agreement Overview**

This agreement outlines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both the thesis supervisor and student throughout the thesis research and writing process.

### ***1. Supervisor's Responsibilities***

The supervisor must:

- i. Provide timely and constructive feedback to student on submitted work. Supervisors should provide feedback to students within [insert the number of days] days (eg. 14 working days).
- ii. Clarify the respective roles of the co-supervisor (if any) clearly to the student and co-ordinate their inputs and feedback.
- iii. Assist in defining the scope and objectives of the research.
- iv. Advise on appropriate methodologies and research techniques.
- v. Guide students to adhere, at all times, to academic integrity, principles relating to the avoidance of plagiarism and ethical requirements for research.
- vi. Ensure that a written record is kept of meetings and feedback supplied to students.
- vii. Provide progress reports to the institution when the need arises.
- viii. Propose suitable assessors to the Head of Department and Faculty for the particular study in accordance with the Faculty and Institutional guidelines (if applicable).
- ix. Attend the student's viva (if applicable)

- x. Oversee any corrections and alterations recommended by the assessors and/or any other relevant person.
- xi. Ensure the student submits the final copy of the research to the institution.

## **2. *Student's Responsibilities***

The student must:

- i. Develop and submit a comprehensive thesis proposal.
- ii. Conduct thorough and ethical research as outlined in the proposal.
- iii. Prepare all documents required for obtaining ethical clearance (if applicable).
- iv. Maintain regular communication with the supervisor regarding progress and challenges.
- v. Adhere to agreed-upon timelines for drafts and revisions.
- vi. Discuss any fieldwork they may undertake or questionnaires or interviews they may want to use in detail with their supervisors for approval before implementation.
- vii. Must participate in seminars, courses, research projects, and programs, including attending and presenting at symposia, seminars, and conferences as directed by the supervisor or as mandated by the faculty regulations.
- viii. Submit a written application supported by a medical certificate from a registered physician or other relevant documentation, if there is the need to temporarily pause their studies due to medical or other valid reasons. This application should be addressed to both the supervisor and the faculty officer, who will forward it to the appropriate authority for review. Students who interrupt their studies without an approved leave of absence will not be registered by the faculty or the institution.
- ix. Incorporate constructive feedback into revisions and final submissions.
- x. Type and proofread their work properly before submitting it to their supervisors. It is not the responsibility of supervisors

- to proofread, edit for grammar, punctuation, spelling, or formatting. Supervisors may require that the student's work be professionally proofread and edited at the student's cost.
- xi. Liaise with their supervisors in terms of finalising their studies and submitting their work.

3. ***Communication***

Regular meetings between the supervisor and student will be scheduled to discuss progress, clarify expectations, and address any issues that may arise during the thesis process. Communication may also include email correspondence and other agreed-upon methods to ensure effective collaboration.

4. ***Timeline***

The anticipated timeline for completion of the thesis is [insert timeline]. This includes key milestones such as proposal submission, literature review, data collection, analysis, draft submissions, and final thesis submission.

5. ***Confidentiality and Ethics***

Both parties agree to uphold confidentiality regarding sensitive information shared during the course of the thesis work. The student will adhere to ethical guidelines relevant to their field of study and institution.

6. ***Dispute Resolution***

In the event of a dispute between a student and a supervisor, efforts are first made to resolve the issue amicably between themselves. If these attempts are unsuccessful, the dispute may be addressed according to the procedures outlined in the Higher Degrees Policy.

## 7. *Signatures*

By signing below, both the thesis supervisor and student acknowledge their acceptance of the roles, responsibilities, and expectations outlined in this agreement.

**Supervisor's**                      **Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student's**                        **Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Variations in Supervisor's Style (Role)**

Supervision styles need to adapt as a research project progresses, providing varying levels of support depending on the stage of the work. The following guidelines outline these changes.<sup>262</sup>

#### **Early Stages**

At the beginning of a research, supervisors help define the research title, propose methods, assess skills, and identify training needs. They shape initial ideas, refine the research scope, set goals, suggest readings, and encourage early writing. Establishing supervision ground rules and connecting with other research students are also part of this stage.

During the first consultation meeting, it is important to establish a strong supervisory relationship and lay the groundwork for the research project. Here is a suggested guide for (new/emerging) supervisors.

- i. **Introductions:** Start by getting to know each other. The supervisor introduces themselves, and the student shares some background information, like their academic history and research interests.

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<sup>262</sup> The following has been taken (with modifications) from Wisker, *The Postgraduate Research Handbook*, 38-40.

- ii. **Topic understanding:** Talk about the student's research topic. Find out what they already know and understand about it.
- iii. **Research skills:** See how familiar the student is with research methods. Ask about any previous research experience or training they have had.
- iv. **Ethics awareness:** Discuss the importance of research ethics and make sure the student understands the rules and policies.
- v. **Strengths and needs:** Identify the student's strengths and areas where they may need more help or training.
- vi. **Working style:** Talk about how the student likes to work and communicate. Find out their preferences for organising their work and managing their time.
- vii. **Writing skills:** Check how well the student writes academically. See if they can structure arguments clearly and express themselves effectively.
- viii. **Project expectations:** Clarify what the student expects from the research project and make sure both of you are on the same page about goals, timelines, and outcomes.

### **Middle Stages**

As the research progresses supervisors maintain contact without being intrusive (unless very necessary). They facilitate discussions to conceptualise ideas and ensure ethical decision-making. They guide goal setting, timeframes, and thesis development, provide thorough feedback, and support researcher independence and autonomy. They also assist with any crises.

When guiding students throughout supervision, the supervisor needs to do the following.

- i. **Give clear instructions:** Offer clear guidance on research tasks, methodologies, and expectations to help the student learn effectively.
- ii. **Provide examples:** Share examples or samples of good work to demonstrate expectations and assist with formatting, style, and content.

- iii. **Offer specific feedback:** Provide detailed feedback on areas needing improvement, along with suggestions for addressing issues.
- iv. **Encourage independent thinking:** Guide students through challenges without simply giving them the answers, fostering independent problem-solving skills.
- v. **Monitor progress:** Regularly review and assess the student's work to ensure they are staying on track with the research project.
- vi. **Foster academic integrity:** Stress the importance of academic honesty by refraining from writing or heavily revising the student's work. Instead, support them in developing their own ideas and writing skills.

### Final Stages

As the project nears submission, supervisors encourage continuous writing, editing, and polishing of the thesis. They review the final version, providing either approval for submission or suggesting further changes. Supervisors also help prepare for the viva and advise on future research and professional development.<sup>263</sup> This preparation may involve conducting mock viva sessions, offering constructive criticism, and ensuring that students are well-versed in addressing potential questions from examiners.

Moreover, supervisors extend their support beyond the viva process by advising students on future research opportunities and professional development. They help students identify potential avenues for further academic exploration based on their research interests and strengths. This guidance may involve recommending relevant conferences, publications, or funding opportunities to enhance the student's scholarly profile. Additionally, supervisors provide insights into career paths within academia or related fields.

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<sup>263</sup> See Appendix VI for notes on how one may prepare for viva and sample questions to expect at the viva.

They also offer valuable mentorship to help students navigate their post-graduation aspirations effectively.

### **Responding to Supervisor's Comments**

In the thesis writing process, one must be guided by the supervisor. Typically, the work is drafted and then sent to the supervisor for review. Feedback may be provided during face-to-face meetings or virtually, and it may also be given in written form. Regardless of the format, it is essential to respond effectively to the supervisor's comments.

Before meeting with your supervisor, ensure your work is polished and sent in advance for review. Schedule meetings well ahead and maintain consistency. During these sessions, focus on clarity and conciseness, providing a brief summary of your work and specific questions needing feedback. Actively listen during the meeting, taking notes on key points and seeking clarification when needed. Document all feedback received and changes made to track improvements. Professionalism is crucial throughout, with punctuality and preparedness demonstrating respect for the supervisor's time. Regular communication to update on progress and challenges faced is also essential to keep the supervisor informed and engaged in the process.

### ***Areas Supervisors Normally Comment on***

Usually, supervisors' comments centre on the following areas.

1. **Content:** Supervisors provide feedback on the substance of the research, including the strength of the arguments presented and the accuracy of the information provided.
2. **Requirements:** Supervisors assess whether the research meets the expected standards and conventions of the academic field, including adherence to genre expectations, proper referencing, and compliance with specific formatting styles.
3. **Cohesion and coherence:** Supervisors evaluate the organisation and flow of the research, ensuring that ideas are

logically connected and presented clearly and coherently. This includes assessing the order of information and the transitions between different sections.

4. **Linguistic accuracy and appropriateness:** Supervisors review the language used in the research for accuracy, clarity, and appropriateness. This may involve correcting grammatical errors, improving sentence structure, and ensuring that terminology is used correctly and consistently throughout the document.
5. **Academic rigour:** Supervisors want their student's work to pass the scrutiny of academic standards. Rigorous research practices equip students with the skills to critically evaluate existing literature, identify gaps in knowledge, and contribute original insights to their discipline. This prepares students for future academic endeavors, including publication in peer-reviewed journals and presentation at academic conferences.

### ***Guidelines for Responding to the Supervisor's Comments***

Effectively responding to their review comments is a crucial step in the thesis writing process. Here is a guide for you.

- i. Read through the supervisor's comments thoroughly to understand their feedback and the areas needing improvement.
- ii. Prioritise comments based on their significance and impact on the overall quality of your work.
- iii. If you have questions or uncertainties about specific comments, seek clarification from your supervisor to ensure you address their concerns accurately.
- iv. Develop a clear plan of action to implement the suggested changes, including timelines and milestones for completing revisions.
- v. Make revisions to your work, incorporating feedback while maintaining coherence and consistency throughout the document.

- vi. Accept the supervisor's comments/suggestions with an understanding that critiques are meant to improve the work, not discourage. But there are situations where you may have to reject the supervisor's suggestion. There should be an important reason for this and the rejections need to be done politely. If you choose not to implement certain suggestions, provide a convincing justification for it. Let your supervisor know why you are not following what they suggested.
- vii. Once revisions are complete, seek approval from your supervisor or submit the revised work for further review as per their guidance.
- viii. Keep a record of the revisions made and how each comment was addressed for future reference or potential resubmission.

Thesis writing comes with a number of challenges. In the next section, I consider some of these challenges and how one may overcome them.

## **6.8 Overcoming Challenges in Thesis Writing**

The thesis writing process is fraught with numerous challenges that can hinder progress and affect the quality of the final work. One of the primary challenges is time management. Balancing research, writing, and other academic or personal commitments can be difficult. To overcome this, create a detailed timeline with specific milestones and deadlines. Breaking down tasks into manageable parts and allocating time slots for each can help you stay on track and make consistent progress.

Writer's block is another common issue, where generating ideas or finding the motivation to write becomes difficult. Establishing a regular writing routine, setting small achievable goals, and starting with easy sections to build momentum can mitigate this problem. Taking breaks and changing your environment can also help spark creativity and maintain productivity.

Additionally, research overload, where the volume of research and data feels overwhelming, can be addressed by focusing

on your research questions and objectives to filter relevant information. When this happens, organising your findings systematically using software or tools can aid in better management. Maintaining coherence throughout the thesis is crucial. A consistent flow and logical progression of ideas can be achieved by developing a detailed outline before you start writing and regularly reviewing and revising sections.

Properly citing sources is another significant challenge, as keeping track of numerous sources and ensuring accurate citations is essential. Using citation management tools like EndNote, Mendeley, or Zotero can help organise references, and familiarising yourself with the required citation style and adhering to it consistently is important.

Aligning your work with the expectations and feedback of your supervisor can also be challenging. Maintaining open and regular communication with your supervisor, seeking clarification when needed, and acting on feedback promptly can help meet these expectations. Data analysis, especially when dealing with complex data, requires choosing appropriate analytical tools and methods. Seeking guidance from experts or taking additional training can enhance your analytical skills.

Editing and proofreading a lengthy document to identify and correct errors is another hurdle. One can overcome this challenge by editing and proofreading in stages (using tools for grammar and spell-check) and considering peer reviews or professional editing services.

Finally, balancing the depth and breadth of your topic is essential to cover it comprehensively without going off on tangents. One can overcome this challenge by sticking closely to their research questions and objectives and regularly revisiting your outline and thesis statement can help you stay focused.

## **6.9 Common Weaknesses/Mistakes in Students' Theses**

My personal experience and survey of literature reveal the following key and common weaknesses/mistakes associated with students'

theses.<sup>264</sup> The reader is encouraged to avoid these weaknesses/mistakes.

1. Students often overlook the importance of organising their thesis in a structured manner to enhance clarity and ensure the impact of their arguments. This leads to poor organisation and difficulty in following the student's train of thought.
2. Some students fail to include essential points or arguments in their thesis, which can weaken the overall coherence and effectiveness of their research. A point is essential and must be included if it (in a way) contributes to answering the research question (s).
3. Students may limit their research scope, resulting in a narrow perspective that overlooks broader implications or connections within the field.
4. Students sometimes struggle to engage in critical analysis and independent thought, relying too heavily on existing research without offering new perspectives or interpretations. The research work, whilst relying on sources, must also show the student's contribution to knowledge. The student's contribution comes into play especially in the analysis of data, formulation of theories, deduction of implications, and conclusions. In the chapter(s) that deal(s) with those areas, the researcher must show their contribution clearly, through innovation, creativity, critical thinking, and analytical skills, among others.
5. Students sometimes fail to construct coherent arguments and also fail to critically evaluate data. This can undermine the effectiveness of the thesis in advancing knowledge in the field.
6. Students' thesis often shows errors in grammar, syntax, and expression. This can detract from the professionalism and credibility of the thesis and impact its overall quality.

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<sup>264</sup> Apart from my personal experience, I also gathered data for this section from John Bitchener, Helen Basturkmen, Martin East and Heather Meyer, *Best Practice in Supervisor Feedback to Thesis Students* (Wellington: Ako Aotearoa, 2011), 15-16.

7. Some students demonstrate shallow analysis and superficial engagement with concepts can result in a lack of depth and complexity in the thesis.
8. Students sometimes fail to address theoretical gaps in the literature or to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework can weaken the theoretical underpinning of the research.
9. Another common weakness is inadequate sampling or data collection techniques. This undermines the reliability and validity of the research findings.
10. Students often fail to state their research problem clearly, justify their study, draw valid conclusions from their findings, and/or ask and answer the right research questions.

### 6.10 Criteria for Examining a Research Thesis

Different criteria are used by different institutions and professors in judging the value of a research thesis/dissertation. I, however, find the following criteria helpful and common among institutions.<sup>265</sup> Examiners (both internal and external) look out for these features when grading research theses.

1. **Clarity and coherence:** A well-judged research thesis demonstrates clarity and coherence in presenting ideas. This ensures that arguments are logically organised and easy to follow.
2. **Relevance and significance:** Examiners assess the relevance and significance of the research and its potential impact on the field and its ability to address pertinent issues or gaps in the literature.
3. **Methodological rigor:** Examiners look for methodological rigour in the research design, data collection, and analysis, assessing the validity, reliability, and appropriateness of the methods employed.

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<sup>265</sup> These ideas were drawn from Vyhmeister and Robertson, *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers*, 4; Eliasu Alhassan, *Understanding the Elements of Research* (Accra: Noyam Publishers, 2023), 35.

4. **Depth of analysis:** Examiners want to see a critical engagement with relevant literature, theories, and empirical evidence as well as insightful interpretations and conclusions.
5. **Clarity of writing:** Examiners consider the clarity and precision of the writing. They assess the effectiveness of communication and the ability to convey complex ideas in a clear and accessible manner. Correct language use, including spelling, grammar, syntax, and paragraph construction is also considered.
6. **Adherence to guidelines:** Examiners evaluate the thesis' adherence to formatting and citation guidelines. They want to see consistency and accuracy in referencing sources and presenting data.
7. **How research questions are addressed:** Examiners check whether the thesis questions have been adequately dealt with. None of them should be left unattended.
8. **Interaction with sources:** Examiners consider how effectively the researcher has interacted with current and relevant sources on the subject matter. Interacting with sources in our writings involves engaging with the ideas, arguments, and evidence presented by other authors in a meaningful and critical manner. Sources must be cited correctly and the bibliography must be formatted properly in line with the format provided by the institution to which the research is submitted.
9. **Contribution to knowledge:** Examiners assess the research's overall contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field, considering its potential to inspire further research, dialogue, or practical applications.

## 6.11 Conclusion

Obviously, writing a thesis or dissertation is a rigorous yet rewarding process that demands dedication, critical thinking, and meticulous attention to detail. By adhering to the principles and strategies outlined in this chapter, students can navigate the complexities of

thesis writing and produce scholarly work that reflects their academic achievements and personal growth. Embracing this journey with perseverance and a commitment to excellence will ultimately lead to the successful completion of their academic endeavours.

### **6.12 Review Exercise**

1. What are the primary purposes of writing a thesis?
2. How does a well-structured thesis contribute to the overall success of your research?
3. What are the key components of a thesis introduction?
4. What strategies can be employed to maintain a logical flow and coherence throughout the thesis?
5. How can you effectively present and analyse your research findings?
6. What are the common challenges faced during the thesis writing process, and how can they be overcome?
7. How should you approach writing the conclusion of your thesis?
8. Why is proper citation essential in academic writing, particularly in a thesis or dissertation?
9. What are the differences between direct quotations and paraphrasing, and when should each be used?
10. What strategies can be used to effectively integrate sources into your thesis without disrupting the flow of your narrative?
11. What role does your supervisor play in guiding your research and writing process?
12. How should the student prepare for and make the most out of meetings with your thesis supervisor?
13. How can you maintain a productive and positive relationship with your thesis supervisor?
14. How can you manage your time effectively throughout the thesis writing process?
15. What role does feedback from your supervisor and peers play in refining your thesis?

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THESIS WRITING

Quality assurance is a critical aspect of academic scholarship. It ensures that research is credible, well-organised, and accurately presented. This chapter covers various elements that contribute to high-quality thesis writing. Starting with the importance of using transitions to maintain a logical flow, it discusses the necessity of paraphrasing and the types of sources appropriate for research. It also covers the correct and appropriate use of sources, including dealing with citations and understanding their significance. The chapter further explores the selection of referencing styles and the general information needed for accurate referencing. Additionally, it addresses how to manage changes from sources, cite secondary or indirect sources, and proofread the final document, among others. Studying this chapter will equip the reader (in one way or the other) to produce research that meets rigorous academic standards and contributes valuable insights to their fields of study.

#### 7.1 Using Transitions

Transitions are words, phrases, or sentences that connect ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or sections within a piece of writing. Transitions play a vital role in research writing. The next section takes this further.

#### Why use Transitions?

One of the primary functions of transitions is to indicate relationships between ideas. They can show progression, contrast, comparison, cause and effect, concession, or clarification. For example, transition words like “however,” “in addition,” “conversely,” “likewise,” “therefore,” and “although” signal shifts in thought or provide context for the reader to understand how one idea relates to another.

Moreover, transitions help maintain the overall coherence and unity of one’s research report. They ensure that each paragraph or section flows logically from the preceding one, avoiding abrupt

jumps or disjointed transitions between ideas. Transitions enable readers to follow the author's argumentation or narrative without confusion.

Furthermore, transitions contribute to the persuasiveness of the research paper by reinforcing the author's argument or thesis. They guide readers through a logical progression of ideas, and hence, help build momentum and reinforce the author's credibility. They also facilitate the integration of evidence and analysis; this helps to demonstrate the validity of the author's claims and enhances the persuasiveness of the overall argument.

In addition to their functional role, transitions also enhance the readability and engagement of the research work. They break up dense blocks of text, making the writing more accessible and inviting to readers. Smooth transitions create a sense of coherence and rhythm, which can captivate the reader's attention and sustain their interest throughout the paper.

They serve as bridges between different parts of the text, guiding readers through the logical flow of ideas and enhancing the coherence and readability of the writing. Transitions also help establish relationships between concepts, show progression or contrast, clarify relationships between ideas, and maintain the overall cohesion of the text.

I proceed to consider some transition words, having outlined why they need to be used.

### **Some Transition Words**

As noted earlier, these words join sentences or paragraphs to help a written piece flow more smoothly. The following examples are given to guide the reader.

- i. To start – first, first of all, to set the ball rolling, to begin with
- ii. To add another idea – besides, further to that, further, furthermore, also, moreover, what's more, in addition, more so, not only ... but also
- iii. To add a more important idea – more importantly, what is worse, what is more, worthy of note is the fact that

- iv. To add your last idea – finally, most of all, lastly, most importantly
- v. To compare or contrast with the previous idea – however, nevertheless, on the other hand, at the same time, correspondingly, in contrast, different from, of course ..., but, on the contrary, in spite of, but, rather
- vi. To show the result of the previous idea – therefore, thus, consequently, as a result, for this reason, the result is that,
- vii. To emphasise an idea – in fact, in particular, certainly, surely
- viii. To give an example of the previous idea – for instance, for example, to illustrate
- ix. To show a time relationship between ideas – first, second, then, next, finally
- x. To express agreement with preceding material– also, in addition, and, likewise

The list is not exhaustive. Readers are encouraged to add to the list.

## **7.2 Paraphrasing and Summarising**

I begin this section by clarifying the difference between quotation, paraphrase, and summary to clear the seeming confusion about these terms. Quotations, paraphrases, and summaries are different methods of incorporating source material into your writing, each serving a distinct purpose. A quotation involves using the exact words from a source, enclosed in quotation marks ('...' or "..."). Quotations are used to present the original author's precise language and phrasing, often because it is particularly powerful, clear, or authoritative. They allow the writer to highlight a specific part of the text that is particularly significant or well-expressed.

A paraphrase, on the other hand, involves restating a passage from a source in your own words whilst retaining the original meaning and roughly the same length. Paraphrasing is used to clarify or simplify the original text, making it more accessible or relevant to your argument whilst avoiding direct copying. It shows that you

understand the source material and can interpret and integrate it into your discussion.

Summarising involves condensing the main ideas or key points of a source into a much shorter form, using your own words. Summaries provide an overview of the essential ideas without going into detail. They are useful for giving readers a quick understanding of the source's content and situating it within the broader context of your writing. Summarising helps to distil complex or lengthy information into a concise format, which can be particularly helpful when dealing with extensive or complicated sources.

Understanding when to use quotations, paraphrases, and summaries is crucial for effective academic writing. Quotations are best for highlighting specific, impactful language; paraphrases help integrate detailed points into one's writing style (without using the exact words of the original author) and summaries provide a brief overview of the main ideas from a source. Each method allows the researcher to engage with source material in a way that supports and enhances their analysis and argumentation.

### **Tips on Paraphrasing**

As noted earlier, paraphrasing involves rephrasing someone else's ideas or words in your own words whilst retaining the original meaning. Here are some tips to help you paraphrase effectively.

- i. Understand the original text thoroughly to grasp its main idea and key points before attempting to paraphrase. After reading the passage, take a moment to contemplate its significance and then rephrase it in a manner that resonates with the context of your paper.
- ii. Use different words and synonyms to express the ideas from the original text in your own vocabulary and sentence structure.
- iii. Avoid merely substituting a word or two in a passage. Instead, rephrase the idea using your language. Merely

altering a few words or restating the information verbatim with different wording amounts to plagiarism.

- iv. After paraphrasing, compare your version with the original. If you find any phrases that closely resemble the original, rephrase them or use quotation marks. If you cannot express an idea differently, opt for a direct quotation.
- v. Change the sentence structure of the original text when paraphrasing to create new sentences that convey the same meaning.
- vi. Focus on identifying and conveying the core ideas and arguments from the original text whilst omitting less important details.
- vii. Ensure that your paraphrase accurately reflects the meaning of the original text without distorting the author's message.
- viii. Always attribute the source by providing proper citation and acknowledgement of the original author after paraphrasing.
- ix. Verify the originality of your paraphrase by comparing it with the original text using plagiarism detection tools or software (if available).
- x. Regularly practice paraphrasing various texts to refine your skills and seek feedback for improvement.
- xi. Read widely across different writing styles and genres to expand your vocabulary and understanding of expression.
- xii. Review and revise your paraphrased text to enhance clarity, coherence, and accuracy before finalising it for use.

### **Tips on Summarising**

The following tips are helpful for summarizing sources.

- i. Focus on the core arguments or points. Highlight key sentences or sections that convey the primary message.
- ii. Eliminate repetitive information or examples. Retain only the essential elements that contribute to the overall understanding.
- iii. Paraphrase the original text using simple and direct language. Aim for brevity without losing the meaning.

- iv. Maintain a logical flow. Organise the summary to reflect the structure of the original document, preserving the sequence of ideas.
- v. Emphasise significant data, findings, or conclusions. Ensure that critical points are well-represented.
- vi. Stick to the author's original intent. Refrain from adding your opinions or interpretations.
- vii. Include key evidence or examples that underpin the main ideas. This adds credibility and context to the summary.
- viii. Where appropriate, use bullet points to list key points. This enhances readability and helps in quickly grasping the information.
- ix. Compare your summary with the original document to ensure that all important aspects are accurately captured.
- x. Review your summary for coherence and conciseness. Edit for grammatical accuracy and clarity.

### **7.3 Using Sources Correctly and Appropriately**

In academic writing, quoting should be used strategically to enhance one's arguments, provide evidence, or convey a particularly powerful or eloquent expression from a source. This section focuses on the kinds of sources in academic work and how they may be used effectively.

#### **Kinds of Sources for Research**

In the context of academic writing, the term “source” refers to any material from which information is gathered. Sources are used to support arguments, provide evidence, and offer context within a piece of scholarly work. Academic sources may be classified essentially three primary, secondary and tertiary sources depending on the originality of the content and the closeness to the source or origin. They provide readers with insights into whether the information is firsthand or conveyed through the perspectives of others, which is typically considered secondhand. Identifying whether a source falls into the categories of primary, secondary, or

tertiary can sometimes pose a challenge. So I will explain them for clarity.

Primary sources are original, firsthand accounts of events, experiences, or research findings. They are created by individuals who directly witnessed or participated in the events or research being documented. Examples of primary sources include: Theses/dissertations, scholarly journal articles (research-based), some government reports, symposia and conference proceedings, original artwork, poems, photographs, speeches, letters, memos, personal narratives, diaries, interviews, autobiographies, and correspondence.

Secondary sources are interpretations or analyses of primary sources. They are works which summarise, interpret, reorganise, or otherwise provide added value to a primary source. Examples of secondary sources are edited works, books and articles that interpret or review research works, histories, biographies, literary criticism and interpretation, reviews of law and legislation, political analyses and commentaries.

Tertiary sources comprise materials that index, abstract, organise, compile, or summarise existing information from other sources. Reference materials and textbooks fall into this category when their primary aim is to present, condense, or repackage ideas or data. Typically, tertiary sources are not attributed to a specific author. Examples include dictionaries/encyclopedias (may also be secondary), almanacs, fact books, atlases, bibliographies (may also be secondary), directories, guidebooks, manuals, handbooks, and textbooks (may be secondary), indexing and abstracting sources. Tertiary literature reviews are seldom used for academic purposes.

As hinted earlier, researcherS must use more primary sources. Secondary sources may be used when primary sources are not available. Tertiary sources may be avoided, if possible.

### **Tips on the use of Sources**

Effectively using sources is crucial for academic research and writing. Properly integrating and citing sources not only strengthens

your arguments but also ensures the credibility and originality of your work. This guide offers essential tips on how to utilise sources correctly, helping you to enhance the quality and integrity of your research projects.

- i. Use sources to support specific points or arguments with evidence from credible sources.
- ii. Quote directly when a source uses unique language or phrasing crucial to your analysis.
- iii. Be selective when quoting. Steer clear of excessive quoting. It is unnecessary to quote entire passages. Use ellipses (...) to signify omitted words. Consult your supervisor regarding their preferred length of quotations—certain supervisors impose word restrictions on quoted sentences or paragraphs.
- iv. Use direct quotes from renowned scholars or experts to lend credibility to your arguments.
- v. Use sources to reference and respond to ideas from other researchers and scholars.
- vi. Use sources to reinforce important concepts or ideas articulated effectively by a source.
- vii. Use direct quotations sparingly. Each direct quotation (whether from the Bible or other sources) increases your dependence on external sources, increases your similarity index<sup>266</sup> and hence makes one's work less original. It is therefore advisable to limit the use of direct quotations in one's work.
- viii. Engage your sources. This means the information taken from others should be woven into your work. They must not be isolated from your work. It is better not to use sources if you are not ready to engage them. Follow the source material with your analysis, interpretations, or arguments.
- ix. Use only relevant and recently published sources. Avoid outdated works. (Since what is outdated differs from institution to institution find out from your supervisor.)

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<sup>266</sup> The next section explains this further.

- x. Use only academic sources. Avoid (as much as possible) blog articles, Wikipedia and any other source that is not peer-reviewed.
- xi. Short direct quotes are typically integrated into the flow of a sentence, whilst longer direct quotes may be presented in block format. What constitutes a long or short quote depends on the referencing style and/or the institution in question. Refer to your citation handbook or your supervisor for specific guidelines on quoting.
- xii. Avoid overreliance on one document. Avoiding overreliance on a single document is crucial when engaging with scholarly sources. Relying too heavily on one source can limit the breadth and depth of your research, and hence make your argument less robust and less credible. Incorporating a diverse range of sources enables one to present a more balanced and comprehensive view of their topic.

When sources are used, they need to be cited. The next section helps the reader to deal effectively with citations.

#### **7.4 Dealing with Citations**

No scholar is an “island.” Every scholar lives in the community of other scholars and hence is bound to use other people’s ideas in their writings. There is no problem with one scholar using another’s ideas or words. However, using someone’s idea or words without citing the source is a “cardinal sin” in academia. For this reason, researchers need to include detailed information on all sources consulted, both within their text and at the end of their work. Referencing helps the reader to find the original source, if they wish, makes one’s argument authentic, and shows how wide the researcher has read. In chapter 4, I dealt with the issue of plagiarism. In this chapter, I take a brief look at general issues related to referencing. Both subjects go hand-in-hand and so the reader is advised to read the notes on plagiarism if they have not already done so.

## What is Citation?

Citation simply means the act of acknowledging or giving credit to sources. All referencing systems have two components, namely, the in-text reference which clearly shows the sources consulted in the body of the text and the reference list/bibliography which gives full details of all the references cited in the work arranged according to the correct academic principles.

Citation may be done in three basic forms, namely, footnotes, endnotes and parenthetical citations. In the case of footnotes and endnotes, the researcher inserts serialised numbers after the sentence or quote that requires a note. Footnotes appear at the foot of every page that has a quotation or borrowed material to provide information about the quotation or borrowed material<sup>267</sup> but endnotes appear at the end of the chapter or entire work. Parenthetical citation involves stating the source of information and the page number in parentheses immediately following the information.

## Why Cite a Source

In academic work, one must ensure proper citation/referencing for at least the following reasons.<sup>268</sup>

- i. Citation/referencing helps readers and the researcher trace the sources of ideas.
- ii. It helps the researcher to connect their ideas with those of other scholars, both past and present.
- iii. It is a means through which one finds their own voice in academic writing. The comment one makes on what they quote leads the reader to know the author's position on a particular subject. Referencing makes the perspective taken, the ideas presented, and the conclusion drawn a matter of choice. A writer may, for instance, decide to argue in favour of the legalisation of euthanasia by choosing to present the views of scholars only.

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<sup>267</sup> This book provides an example of footnoting.

<sup>268</sup> Gleaned from Colin Neville, *From the Complete Guide to Referencing and Avoiding Plagiarism* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2007), 8ff.

- iv. It is a means of authenticating one's claims.
- v. It is a means by which knowledge can be spread easily. Through referencing, readers are offered the opportunity to consult the materials cited and use ideas from them for their work. Referencing, therefore, fosters the development and transmission of ideas.
- vi. It is a means of acknowledging that other people have conducted research in the area already. In other words, the researcher uses referencing as a means of giving appreciation to other people's work and acknowledging their hard work.
- vii. It is a way of showing academic honesty which is achieved through the acknowledgement of the work of others.

### **Choosing a Style of Citation**

What system of citation should be used? There are several referencing styles available for use. Different institutions and publishers use their own style and/or variation of a referencing system. All referencing styles are built on the same idea of citing a source in the text of a research work. The various referencing systems we have can be distilled into three main groups, namely, in-text name styles, consecutive numbering and recurrent numbering.

In the in-text (parenthetical) citation, the name(s) of the author(s), editor(s) or organisation(s), year of publication and page number(s) (if applicable) are stated in the text. The Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), Harvard, Chicago (author-date),<sup>269</sup> APA and MLA models fall under this category.

Consecutive numbering style uses superscript numbers (like <sup>1</sup>) in the text which links to footnotes or endnotes. In the case of endnotes, they may appear at the end of each chapter or at the end of the entire document (as stated earlier). In the case of footnotes, the superscripted numbers link up to the notes that appear at the foot of the page. The Oxford and Chicago (Turabian) styles fall under this

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<sup>269</sup> Chicago-style source citations come in two varieties: (1) notes and bibliography and (2) author-date.

category. The styles offer two alternatives to users, endnotes or footnotes.

Recurrent numbering uses bracketed (or superscript) numbers in the text to link up with a list of references either at the end of the chapter or the entire work. Examples are British Standard (numeric) and Vancouver.

Regardless of the method used, it is often required that a list of all sources be listed alphabetically under the heading “References”, “Reference list”, “Work cited”, “Works consulted” or “Bibliography” (depending on the style). This list is usually prepared at the end of the work. The researcher must find out which referencing style is used in their institution.

A reference list, generally, contains only sources you have cited in-text in your assignment. Give full publication details of the sources in a list at the end of your paper.

A bibliography, generally, is a complete list of sources consulted about a topic, but not necessarily cited in your work. This means that in addition to listing the sources you cited in-text, you also list resources that you read or referred to generate your ideas about the topic. A bibliography looks the same as a reference list, except that it may list more sources than a reference list in the same piece of work.

### **Some Key Information Necessary for Citation**

- i. Names of authors (first and surnames)
- ii. Title of journal article, chapter, or conference paper
- iii. Name of journal, book, conference, etc.
- iv. Date of publication
- v. Volume and issue numbers (for journals)
- vi. Editor, compiler, translator of book (if applicable)
- vii. Publisher (for books)
- viii. City of publication (for books)
- ix. Page numbers (of article or book chapter )

The italicisation of book titles and names of journals (not the title of the journal articles) is common to almost all the citation models. The students are urged to consult the citation manual relevant to their study for further information.

### **Dealing with Changes from a Source**

In the process of incorporating sources into research, researchers may encounter situations where the original content needs to be adapted or modified to fit the context of their work. This section will guide you through the principles and best practices for making such changes, ensuring that your research remains credible and ethically sound. The following guidelines may be followed when dealing with changes in the original source.

#### *i. Insertions into Original Sources*

When you change the first letter in a quotation to an uppercase or lowercase letter, the letter must be enclosed in square brackets ([ ]). Assuming you have the following sentence from a text: “the importance of quality assurance in thesis writing cannot be overstated.” Now, you want to start the quotation with a capital letter to fit the grammatical structure of your sentence, and so you would change “the” to “[T]he”. You will write: “[T]he importance of quality assurance in thesis writing cannot be overstated.”

Conversely, if you need to integrate the quotation into a sentence where a lowercase letter is necessary, you would change “The” to “[t]he”. You may have something like: According to the guidelines, quality assurance is crucial because “[t]he importance of quality assurance in thesis writing cannot be overstated.”

In general, when new materials are introduced into the quotation, square brackets ([ ]) must be used to enclose the material inserted. This is true whether the insertion is a letter, a word, a sentence, or a paragraph.

*ii. Omitting Something from the Original Source*

When some information is omitted from the original material, three-spaced ellipsis points i.e. three dots (...) must be placed at the place where the omission takes place. If the omission is immediately preceded or followed by a full stop, add the ellipsis (three dots) to make it four dots (....).

If the omitted section is in the middle of a sentence, such as “Quality assurance in thesis writing involves several critical steps, including data verification, peer review, and adherence to ethical guidelines, to ensure the integrity and reliability of the research findings,” it should be written as “Quality assurance in thesis writing involves several critical steps, including data verification, peer review, ... to ensure the integrity and reliability of the research findings.”

If the omission occurs at the end of a sentence, and it is immediately preceded by a full stop, four dots should be used: “Quality assurance in thesis writing involves several critical steps, including data verification, peer review, and adherence to ethical guidelines....”<sup>270</sup> This approach ensures that the integrity of the original material is preserved while making the text concise and relevant to the context.

*iii. Adding Emphasis to Original Source*

When the emphasis is added to the material quoted by italicising or highlighting some portions, the writer must have a footnote or endnote like “emphasis mine”, “my emphasis”; “emphasis added”, “emphasis not original” or any other to indicate that you have added the emphasis. If the original source says “It is Nyarko who came here” one may write it as “It is **Nyarko** who came here” or “It is *Nyarko* who came here” with the emphasis placed on Nyarko by highlighting or italicising.

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<sup>270</sup> In this case, the ellipsis end with a full stop because it comes at the end of the sentence.

*iv. Changing the Punctuation Mark in a Source*

When making adjustments to punctuation marks or changing single quotation marks to double, and vice versa, to conform to syntactical rules, no explicit explanation is typically necessary. For example, if a direct quote originally ends with a full stop but needs to be integrated into a sentence that ends with a question mark, you might adjust it accordingly: “She asked, ‘Will you be attending the meeting?’.” Here, the period within the quotation is modified to a comma to maintain grammatical consistency.

Similarly, converting single quotation marks within a quote to double for consistency requires no additional annotation unless specified by specific editorial guidelines. This approach ensures that the quotation fits seamlessly within the sentence structure while adhering to established grammatical norms.

*v. Correcting an Error in the Original Source*

Direct quotation must include the original author’s exact words and punctuation, including any spelling or grammatical errors. To correct errors in the original wording place the word “sic” in square brackets, [sic], in the quote directly after the error. For instance: “It is common practice [sic] among Indigenous Akans to marry more than one woman.” “We practice [sic] shooting twice a week.”

In the next section, I explain how may cite secondary sources.

**Citing Secondary or Indirect Sources**

Earlier I grouped sources into primary, secondary and tertiary ones. In this section, a source is considered primary if the present writer read it and is not citing it through another source. A secondary<sup>271</sup> or indirect source is one that the writer has not read. As much as possible one must avoid citing secondary/indirect sources. However, if it becomes unavoidable to cite secondary sources (for example if the material is out of print or not available in English), cite both works in the text but only cite the work you have read in the bibliography.

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<sup>271</sup> This differs from the secondary source that has been explained earlier.

The citation begins with the name of the original author followed by the expression “cited in” and then followed by the bibliographic information of the document through which the original author is cited. For example, if I read Asibu’s assertion in Isaac Nyanful’s book, I will say “Asibu as cited in Isaac Nyanful... (complete the bibliographic information)” for Turabian style for example or “(Asibu as cited in Nyanful... [add other needed information eg. year and page)” for in-text citation.<sup>272</sup>

## 7.5 Dealing with Ambiguities

Ambiguities in writing refer to instances where a word, phrase, or sentence can be interpreted in more than one way, leading to confusion or misunderstanding. Ambiguities can arise from various sources, such as:

### Forms of Ambiguity

Ambiguity may exist in many forms, some of which are outlined below.

- i. **Lexical ambiguity:** When a word has multiple meanings. For example, “bank” can refer to a financial institution or the side of a river.
- ii. **Structural ambiguity:** When the structure or syntax of a sentence allows for multiple interpretations. For example, “Visiting relatives can be annoying” could mean that the act of visiting relatives is annoying or that relatives who visit can be annoying.
- iii. **Pronoun reference ambiguity:** When it is unclear to which noun a pronoun refers. This is the most common form of ambiguity I encounter in students’ work. For example, “The teacher told the student that he was brilliant” could mean either the teacher or the student is brilliant.
- iv. **Scope ambiguity:** When it is unclear how far a particular qualifier or modifier extends. For example, “All the students

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<sup>272</sup> See footnote 115 in this book for example.

in the class must complete the assignment by Monday” could imply that the entire class has one collective assignment or that each student has an individual assignment.

- v. **Punctuation ambiguity:** When the lack of or improper use of punctuation leads to multiple interpretations. For example, “Let's eat, Grandma!” versus “Let's eat Grandma!”

### **Eliminating Ambiguities**

Eliminating ambiguities is crucial for clear and effective communication. It ensures that the intended meaning is conveyed accurately to the reader. Here are some strategies to address and eliminate ambiguities.<sup>273</sup>

- i. **Synonymy:** Replace ambiguous words with clear synonyms. For example, instead of “The doctor made them well,” you could say “The doctor made them healthy.”
- ii. **Expansion:** Add words to the sentence to remove ambiguity. Instead of “She saw the man with the telescope,” say “She saw the man who was holding the telescope.”
- iii. **Rearrangement:** Rearrange the elements of the sentence to clarify meaning. For instance, “She gave a lecture on whales in the classroom” can be clarified as “In the classroom, she gave a lecture on whales” to indicate that the lecture was held in the classroom.
- iv. **Capitalisation:** Use capital letters to clarify proper nouns and reduce ambiguity. For example, “You should call your uncle George” becomes “You should call your Uncle George” to specify that the uncle's name is George.
- v. **Punctuation:** For example, “The doctor said the patient’s condition is critical now” becomes “The doctor said, ‘The patient’s condition is critical now.’” to show that the doctor is quoting a statement about the patient's condition.

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<sup>273</sup> I have taken these (with redaction) from “Avoiding Ambiguity in Your Writing.” (Retrieved from <https://www.gvsu.edu/wc/avoiding-ambiguity-in-your-writing-107.htm>. Accessed on 10-06-2024).

- vi. **Spelling:** Be mindful of words that are spelled the same but have different meanings. While spelling may not always resolve written ambiguities, careful word choice can help. For example, “He saw a fly on the wall” can be clarified as “He saw a fly buzzing around the wall” to specify the insect rather than the action of flying.
- vii. **Alteration of context:** Provide sufficient context to restrict the meaning of ambiguous words or structures. For example, instead of “The puppy sat by the girl with the contented look,” specify “The puppy with the contented look sat by the girl” or “The puppy sat by the girl who had a contented look.”
- viii. **Use of grammatical signals:** Employ gender signals, person-thing signals, number signals, and coordination signals to clarify meaning.

Examples include the following.

- a. **Gender signals:** “The cat slept on the woman’s bed” becomes “The cat slept on her bed” to specify whose bed it is.
- b. **Person-thing signals:** “The book that was left on the table belongs to the librarian” becomes “The book left on the table belongs to the librarian” to specify the subject.
- c. **Number signals:** “Some of the apples in the basket are ripe” becomes “Some of the apples in the basket is ripe” to match the verb with the singular subject.
- d. **Coordination signals:** “He went to the store and bought some milk which was on sale” becomes “He went to the store and bought some milk that was on sale” to clarify the relationship between the actions.
- e. **Successive modifiers:** Be cautious with successive modifiers, which can create ambiguity. For instance, “small business man” could mean either a small businessman or a man in a small business. To clarify, say “a businessman with a small business” or “a small man in business.”

Strong arguments improve the quality of one’s writing. However, they are not easy to construct. Therefore, I use the next section to guide researchers to argue strongly.

## 7.6 Arguing Strongly

Constructing a strong argument in academic research is essential for defending work against skepticism and guiding it toward acceptance and deeper understanding. Beyond presenting evidence, academic arguments integrate diverse information into cohesive narratives that challenge perspectives and introduce new insights. Compelling arguments advance knowledge and provide structure for organizing data, interpreting findings, and making informed conclusions. Clear and logical assertions enhance the clarity of academic writing and promote engagement among readers, distinguishing rigorous scholarship in today’s academic landscape. The purpose of this section is to provide guidelines for crafting strong arguments.<sup>274</sup>

Understanding arguments involves grasping how assertions or claims are substantiated with strong evidence, logical reasoning, and persuasive rhetoric. Such arguments withstand scrutiny, challenge opposing views, and effectively convey the validity of a particular perspective or interpretation. In academic discourse, an argument refers to a structured set of statements aimed at supporting or justifying a claim. Unlike its colloquial sense of disagreement, academic arguments present evidence and reasoning cohesively to persuade others of the claim’s validity.<sup>275</sup>

### Kinds of Argument

Understanding these types of arguments helps in structuring persuasive reasoning, presenting evidence effectively, and engaging

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<sup>274</sup> This section draws from Jessica Abbadia, “Building a Strong Argument in Academic Research,” (2024) (<https://mindthegraph.com/blog/cs/strong-argument/>) (accessed: 24-06-24)

<sup>275</sup> Wendy Laura Belcher, *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success* Second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 66.

in meaningful academic and intellectual discussions across various fields of study. Here are the main types of arguments. One has to decide which kind(S) is/are suitable for each section of the work.

1. **Deductive arguments:** Deductive arguments proceed from general principles or premises to specific conclusions. These arguments are structured in a way that if the premises are true, the conclusion must necessarily follow. For example, “All roses have thorns. This flower is a rose, so it must have thorns.” Deductive reasoning aims for certainty and is common in formal logic and mathematics.
2. **Inductive arguments:** Inductive reasoning draws general conclusions based on specific observations, suggesting that something is likely or probable. For instance, “Every time I eat garlic, I get a rash. Therefore, I am allergic to strawberries. Inductive reasoning does not guarantee the truth of the conclusion, but rather suggests that it is likely or probable based on the evidence. Inductive reasoning is prevalent in scientific research and empirical investigations.
3. **Abductive arguments:** Abductive reasoning proposes the most plausible explanation or hypothesis given the available evidence, aiming to provide the best-fit solution. For example, “The lights in the house are flickering. The most likely explanation is that there is an issue with the electrical wiring.” These arguments are often used in scientific inference and detective work, where multiple explanations are considered, and the best-fit explanation is chosen.
4. **Analogical arguments:** Analogical reasoning involves drawing parallels between similar situations to argue for a particular conclusion. It assumes that what holds true in one case applies to another. For instance, “Just as exercise improves physical health, mental exercises like puzzles and reading can enhance cognitive abilities.”
5. **Causal arguments:** Causal arguments seek to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between variables or events. They assert that one event or condition directly leads to

another. For instance, “Increased consumption of sugary drinks is linked to higher rates of obesity among children.” This type of argument is important in scientific research, social sciences, and policy-making to understand and address the root causes of phenomena.

6. **Evaluative arguments:** In evaluative arguments, the focus is on assessing the quality or worth of something based on specific criteria. For instance, one might argue that a new public transport system improves city mobility by considering factors like reduced traffic congestion, increased ridership, and environmental benefits. The argument supports this assessment with data from similar initiatives in other cities, concluding that the new transport system would be advantageous for the community.

### **Tips on Crafting Strong Arguments**

- i. Formulate a clear and specific thesis statement that succinctly presents your main argument and previews the supporting reasons.
- ii. Support your claims with credible sources (such as empirical data, expert opinions, and examples) and provide proper citations to acknowledge these sources.
  - a. Evaluate the trustworthiness and dependability of the sources you plan to utilise. This involves assessing factors such as the author’s credentials, the reputation of the publication or institution, the recency of the information, and whether the source has undergone peer review or editorial review.
  - b. The importance of supporting evidence lies in its ability to enhance credibility by (1). grounding arguments in factual basis rather than opinions or assumptions, (2). strengthening persuasiveness through tangible support, (3). building trust by demonstrating thorough research and knowledge, and (4). preempting counterarguments to reinforce the argument’s robustness.

- iii. Develop a logical structure that organises your argument cohesively, guiding readers through your reasoning step-by-step. Address potential counterarguments objectively to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the topic.
- iv. Use clear, precise and persuasive language to articulate your argument, avoiding ambiguity and ensuring clarity.
- v. The next section considers the issue of persuasion further.

### **On the Use of Persuasive Language**

Using persuasive language and effective rhetorical devices can greatly enhance the impact of your argument by captivating your audience, evoking emotional responses, and compelling them to consider your perspective. Here are some important tips.

- i. Use emotive language to evoke feelings through powerful words and phrases. For example, one may describe the crucifixion of Jesus as a “heart-wrenching sacrifice that moved believers to tears.”
- ii. Employ vivid imagery by using descriptive language and sensory details to create clear mental images. For instance, vividly describe Moses parting the Red Sea (Exod. 14) as portraying “towering walls of water and the Israelites’ awe-inspiring escape from Egypt.”
- iii. Utilise analogies and metaphors to connect abstract concepts with concrete examples. For example, explain the concept of salvation by likening it to “a lost sheep being lovingly carried back to the flock by the Good Shepherd.”
- iv. Employ repetition to emphasise key points for memorability and impact. For example, the phrase “God’s unconditional love” may be repeated throughout one’s work to underscore its centrality in the subject matter under consideration.
- v. Pose rhetorical questions to prompt reflection without expecting an immediate answer. For example, ask, “What does it mean to live a life of faith?” to encourage listeners to ponder their personal beliefs and commitments.

- vi. Support your arguments with an appeal to authority by citing credible experts and reliable sources. When discussing Christian ethics, reference the teachings of Saint Augustine or Pope Francis to bolster your arguments. Every subject has scholars considered as authorities. Interact with them and use their ideas to strengthen your argument.
- vii. Use powerful words to convey urgency and importance in your theological discussions. For example, one may describe the call to mission as a “crucial imperative for spreading the gospel to all corners of the world.”
- viii. Establish common ground by finding common ground with your audience by acknowledging shared values or experiences. For example, one may discuss the universal value of compassion in different religious traditions, highlighting how “compassion unites humanity across diverse faiths.”
- ix. Highlight contrasts to underscore the significance of your arguments. One may compare the concept of salvation in Christianity, which is based on grace, with the concept of karma in Hinduism, which focuses on the consequences of actions.
- x. Ground the arguments in logic and evidence by supporting your points with logical reasoning and empirical support. For example, one may use archaeological discoveries such as the Dead Sea Scrolls to support the historical accuracy of biblical texts.

### **7.7 Dealing with Sweeping Statements**

In academic discourse, the precision of language is paramount. Sweeping statements, which are broad and generalised claims that fail to account for individual differences or specific circumstances, are particularly problematic. They not only compromise the accuracy and credibility of the argument but also perpetuate stereotypes and biases. This section explores the nature of sweeping statements, the reasons for their avoidance, and practical strategies to ensure more accurate and nuanced communication.

## **What is a Sweeping Statement?**

A sweeping statement (or overgeneralisation) is a broad, generalised claim that applies to all instances or members of a particular group without considering individual differences or specific circumstances. It occurs when one gives a conclusive or decisive comment about something or someone. These statements often lack nuance and fail to account for exceptions or variations.

## **Why Avoid Sweeping Statements?**

Sweeping statements should be avoided because they are often factually incorrect, overlooking important details and exceptions. Such statements can reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate biases, leading to unfair or prejudiced views of certain groups.

Furthermore, sweeping statements can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, as they do not convey the complexity of a situation or group. The use of sweeping statements can also undermine credibility, suggesting a lack of thorough analysis and critical thinking.

Additionally, they can cause harm by oversimplifying complex issues, potentially leading to misguided decisions or actions.

## **How to Avoid Sweeping Statements**

To avoid making sweeping statements, it is important to be specific. Providing detailed and specific information rather than making broad claims is crucial. Focusing on particular instances or examples can help support a point effectively. Incorporating words like “some,” “many,” “often,” “generally,” or “in many cases” can indicate that a statement does not apply universally. It is essential to consider all relevant facts and perspectives before making a statement, avoiding conclusions based on limited information. Recognising and mentioning exceptions to a claim demonstrates an understanding of the issue’s complexity. Discussing statements with others can help check for accuracy and gain different perspectives that might reveal overlooked details.

## **7.8 Interpreting Similarity Index and Dealing with Related Issues**

Maintaining originality and ensuring work integrity is crucial in any academic research. The similarity index, which assesses the uniqueness of written content, plays a vital role by comparing submissions against extensive literature databases to highlight overlaps and matching text. Understanding and managing the similarity index is essential for avoiding plagiarism and upholding scholarly standards. This section offers key tips on interpreting and managing the similarity index to produce original, high-quality academic work.<sup>276</sup>

### **What is the Similarity Index?**

An originality/similarity report is a report that quantifies how similar your work is to other pieces of writing. In other words, the similarity index refers to the percentage of text in a document that matches content found in other sources. It is typically calculated using plagiarism detection software or online tools.

Plagiarism detection tools/software compare the submitted document against a vast database of academic papers, websites, books, and other sources to identify any matches. The similarity index indicates how much of the text is similar to existing content, including direct quotes, paraphrased passages, or even common phrases. The similarity index is usually presented as a percentage, indicating the proportion of the document that matches existing content. Thus, this report reflects what percentage of the student's work has been found to match other sources. A higher similarity index suggests a greater likelihood of plagiarism or improper citation practices.

Examples of plagiarism detection software include Turnitin, Grammarly, Copyleaks, Unicheck, Plagscan, Quetext, iThenticate, Small SEO Tools, and DupliChecker. Each of these has a unique way

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<sup>276</sup> Use the following link to read more about the issues outlined in this section: [https://help.turnitin.com/Resources/PDF/understanding\\_the\\_turnitin\\_similarity\\_report-a\\_student\\_guide.pdf](https://help.turnitin.com/Resources/PDF/understanding_the_turnitin_similarity_report-a_student_guide.pdf)

of accepting documents and generating its report. It is beyond the scope of this book to go into those details. The student is advised to seek assistance in submitting their documents and getting the similarity report.

### **Interpreting a Similarity Index**

Interpreting a similarity index report from a plagiarism detection tool involves understanding the results presented and determining whether the detected similarities are acceptable or indicate potential plagiarism and whether there is/are case(s) of plagiarism in the draft. Here is a brief outline of how to interpret such a report.

#### *i. Overall Similarity Percentage*

A similarity index report typically provides a percentage indicating the overall similarity between the submitted document and existing sources. This percentage represents the proportion of text in the submitted document that matches other sources. A higher percentage suggests a higher level of similarity. A 30% originality index means 30% of the work is found in other works and 70% is your own (original) writing. Generally, the X% similarity index means X% of the work matches with works that have already been published and (100-X)% of the work does not match with what people have already published. The level of originality of the work is inversely/indirectly proportion to the similarity index. Thus, the higher the similarity index the less the originality of the work.

The color of the report icon indicates the similarity score of the paper, based on the amount of matching or similar text that was uncovered. The percentage range is 0% to 100%. The possible similarity ranges include:<sup>277</sup>

- **Blue:** No matching text
- **Green:** One word to 24% matching text
- **Yellow:** 25-49% matching text

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<sup>277</sup> What I have provided here is not universal. Each institution and software may have a way of classifying them.

- **Orange:** 50-74% matching text
- **Red:** 75-100% matching text

Normally some similarity is expected because in academic work one will definitely refer to sources. However, the percentage must be within the acceptable range.

Educational institutions and publishers often set acceptable thresholds for similarity indexes, beyond which further investigation or revisions may be required to ensure academic integrity. These guidelines may vary depending on factors such as the type of assignment, citation style, and discipline. There is a need to have a guide from the supervisor or the institution. Ultimately, maintaining a low similarity index is essential for upholding ethical standards in academic writing and research.

#### *ii. Highlighted Texts*

Plagiarism detection tools often highlight the matching texts within the submitted document and the corresponding sources. Review these highlighted sections to see which parts are similar and assess whether they involve direct copying, paraphrasing, or coincidence. Ensure that all direct quotes are within quotation marks and properly cited. Paraphrased content should be substantially rephrased and attributed to the original source.

#### *iii. Source List*

The report will provide a list of sources where matches were found. Each of them will have a percentage beside it, indicating the extent to which you used (copied, paraphrased) that source. Use this list to verify your citations and ensure all borrowed ideas are correctly attributed.

#### *iv. Context Matters*

Not all matches are problematic. Not all similarities are indicative of plagiarism. Common phrases, technical terminology, or widely accepted knowledge, titles, or properly cited quotes will appear in the

report but may not constitute plagiarism. Assess the context of the similarities. Contextual analysis can help differentiate between legitimate similarities and instances of academic misconduct. Focus on significant matches that involve unique ideas or substantial text.

### **Dealing with Similarity Issues**

The revision of one's work after the similarity report is generated aims at addressing cases of (possible) plagiarism and reducing the similarity index to increase the originality of the work (make the work more original or more of your own writing).

- i. Carefully review the highlighted sections that match other sources. Identify if these instances are properly cited and referenced. If any unintentional plagiarism is found, rephrase or paraphrase the content in your own words while ensuring the original meaning is retained. Add appropriate citations for any direct quotes or paraphrased ideas.
- ii. Use the report to check for excessive reliance on a single source and aim for a balanced integration of multiple references.
- iii. Review your revised document to ensure that all sources are accurately credited and that your work maintains originality and academic integrity. As noted earlier, reducing the similarity index requires avoiding direct quotations.<sup>278</sup>
- iv. Resubmit your work for another report. If necessary, go through the process again (and again) until your work is acceptable.

### **Reducing Similarity Index**

Enhancing the quality of one's work requires maintaining a low similarity index. Reducing the similarity index of your document not only reflects one's genuine understanding of the topic but also

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<sup>278</sup> Use the link below to watch a short video that provides further insight: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_aAqCi8eyAE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aAqCi8eyAE).

upholds ethical standards. The following strategies will help you minimise similarity, ensuring your work is both unique and credible.

- i. Rephrase information in your own words instead of copying text verbatim from sources. This applies to all texts including sacred texts (eg. Biblical texts). Direct quotation increases the similarity index and so must be used sparingly.
- ii. Increase the proportion of your own analysis, insights, and ideas in the work. Instead of merely summarising or paraphrasing existing sources, it is crucial to engage with the material by interpreting data, theories, and findings, explaining their significance, drawing connections, and critiquing their strengths and weaknesses. Reflecting on how the information relates to personal experiences, previous knowledge, or the broader field of study increases the percentage of your own writing and reduces the similarity index.
- iii. Go through the text to identify and rewrite any passages that closely mirror the source material.
- iv. Condense larger sections of text into shorter summaries that capture the essential points while using your own words. This may be applicable to large areas which match external sources.

After drafting the work, one needs to proofread the work to improve the quality further. The next section introduces the reader to proofreading which can help make one's work "clean."

## **7.9 Proofreading**

To ensure that the work presented is standard and acceptable, the researcher is encouraged to proofread their work carefully. A friend, relative, or professional proofreader may also be asked to do additional proof-reading. It is appropriate to familiarise yourself with the current trend of (basic) grammatical rules before writing or attempting to proofread. It is very important to proofread every paper

before submitting it. This is done to check for mistakes and to correct them.

Proofreading is the final step in the writing process. It focuses on reviewing and correcting the text to ensure it is free of errors and polished for publication or submission. It involves a thorough examination of the document to identify and fix various types of mistakes. When proofreading, look for the following areas to improve the quality and professionalism of your document.<sup>279</sup>

- i. Proofread a printed copy of a document rather than softcopy on a computer screen.
- ii. Read the entire document sentence by sentence, covering all sentences (except the one being read) with another piece of paper to remain focused.
- iii. Check the following while you read each sentence:
  - a) Wrong spelling
  - b) Wrong use of words
  - c) Incorrect grammar
  - d) Wrong use of punctuation marks
  - e) Omission of words and punctuation marks
  - f) Inconsistent use of spelling patterns (ie. American or British spellings)
  - g) Ambiguities: Ambiguities in writing occur when a word, phrase, or sentence can be interpreted in more than one way.<sup>280</sup>
  - h) Omission of reference: This is a situation where the writer fails to reference certain ideas taken from the works of others.
  - i) Wrong paragraph division: That is, separating related ideas into two different paragraphs instead of developing them into one paragraph.
  - j) Inconsistent abbreviation of names of books of the bible (eg. Use of Matt., Mat., and Mt. to refer to Matthew; use

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<sup>279</sup> I have provided these points based on my experience as a researcher.

<sup>280</sup> I have dealt with ambiguities later in the chapter.

of 1 Cor., I Cor., 1 Corinthians all to refer to Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church). The point is that the writer must make reference to any biblical book in the same way throughout their work.

- k) Incomplete bibliographical information such as the omission of the name of publisher, date, etc.
- l) The flow of thought, coherence, etc.
- iv. Consult a dictionary or grammar book if you doubt about anything (spelling or meaning of a word). If you are still unsure, mark the line and ask someone for help.
- v. Use clear and concise language, avoiding ambiguity and eliminating unnecessary words or phrases.
- vi. Verify the accuracy of facts, dates, names, and statistics.
- vii. Ensure the tone and voice are appropriate for the intended audience and align with the purpose of the document.
- viii. Check for proper indentation, spacing, alignment, and overall layout consistency.
- ix. Ensure correct font usage, size, and style throughout the document.
- x. Review images, charts, and graphs for clarity, relevance, proper labelling, and accurate citation.
- xi. Look for errors in context, such as incorrect references, outdated information, or misplaced details.
- xii. Ensure the document adheres to the specified style guide (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago), including citations and references/bibliography. Be consistent with your citations.
- xiii. Assess the overall readability and flow of the text, ensuring it is engaging and easy to follow.
- xiv. Verify the logical flow of ideas and coherence between paragraphs and sections. Make insertions, where necessary, to improve the flow of thought and coherence.
- xv. Eliminate redundant phrases or sentences to make the text more concise. Delete repeated portions.
- xvi. Ensure smooth transitions between ideas and sections to enhance the reader's understanding.

- xvii. Use clear and concise language, avoiding ambiguity and eliminating unnecessary words or phrases.

### **7.10 Conclusion**

Ensuring quality in thesis writing involves meticulous attention to several key components. Effective use of transitions helps maintain a smooth narrative flow, while proper paraphrasing techniques safeguard against plagiarism. Selecting the right sources and using them correctly enhances the reliability of the research. Mastering the nuances of citation and referencing not only gives due credit to original authors but also strengthens the thesis's scholarly foundation. Addressing changes from sources, appropriately citing secondary references, and adhering to punctuation rules further polish the thesis. Finally, thorough proofreading is essential to eliminate errors and present a polished, professional document. By integrating these practices, researchers can ensure their theses are not only academically sound but also articulate and impactful, upholding the highest standards of academic excellence.

### **7.11 Review Exercise**

1. Explain the role of transitions in maintaining the logical flow of a thesis. Provide examples of effective transition phrases.
2. What is paraphrasing, and why is it important in thesis writing? Discuss the techniques for effective paraphrasing.
3. Identify and describe the different kinds of sources that can be used for research in thesis writing. Which sources are considered most credible and why?
4. How can a researcher ensure that they are using sources correctly and appropriately in their thesis? Give examples of best practices.
5. Define citation and discuss its importance in academic writing. What are the consequences of failing to cite sources properly?

6. Compare and contrast at least two different styles of referencing commonly used in academic writing. Discuss the key features of each style.
7. What general information is necessary for proper referencing in a thesis? Explain the components that should be included in a reference entry.
8. Discuss the challenges of citing secondary or indirect sources. How can these be appropriately managed in academic writing?
9. Explain the importance of punctuation in research writing. What are some common punctuation errors that can affect the clarity and professionalism of a thesis?
10. Describe the process and importance of proofreading in thesis writing. What strategies can be used to ensure thorough and effective proofreading?

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Finding Resources for Research

You can visit your institution's physical library and get the needed materials from the shelves. However, in modern times, one can get a lot of resources from the internet. Here are some strategies for finding materials for your research.

1. **Partitioning:** Break your topic into words and phrases and search for information on the pieces. When searching on the net add “pdf” to what you are searching for, For example, if I want to search for Christology in Africa, I will type “Christology in Africa pdf”.
2. **Academic databases:** Search online databases like Google Scholar, JSTOR, EBSCO, ProQuest, and Web of Science.
3. **Library catalogues:** Check your institution's library catalogue and WorldCat for books, theses, and dissertations.
4. **Online archives:** Explore online archives like Internet Archive, Project Gutenberg, and Google Books.
5. **Research gateways:** Utilise research gateways like ResearchGate, and Semantic Scholar.
6. **Journal websites:** Visit websites of relevant journals and search for articles.
7. **Conference proceedings:** Look for conference papers and proceedings.
8. **Government reports:** Search for government reports and data.
9. **Primary sources:** Find primary sources like historical documents, images, and data.
10. **Interlibrary loan:** Request materials from other libraries through interlibrary loan services.

## Appendix II: Links to Some Journals

Below are links to some academic journals. They are all open access journals, meaning you can download the articles for free.

No.	Journal	Link to Published Articles
1.	Acta Theologica	<a href="https://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at/issue/archive">https://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at/issue/archive</a>
2.	Verbum et Ecclesia	<a href="https://verbumetecclisia.org.za/index.php/ve/issue/archive">https://verbumetecclisia.org.za/index.php/ve/issue/archive</a>
3.	Conspectus	<a href="https://sats.ac.za/conspectus/">https://sats.ac.za/conspectus/</a>
4.	Scriptura	<a href="https://scriptura.journals.ac.za/pub/issue/archive">https://scriptura.journals.ac.za/pub/issue/archive</a>
5.	E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences	<a href="https://noyam.org/journals/ehass/all-issues/">https://noyam.org/journals/ehass/all-issues/</a>
6.	E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies	<a href="https://noyam.org/journals/erats/all-issues/">https://noyam.org/journals/erats/all-issues/</a>
7.	Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology (MOTBIT)	<a href="https://noyam.org/journals/motbit/all-issues/">https://noyam.org/journals/motbit/all-issues/</a>
8.	Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Prophetic Movements Journal (PECANEP)	<a href="https://noyam.org/journals/pecanep/all-issues/">https://noyam.org/journals/pecanep/all-issues/</a>
9.	Legon Journal of Humanities	<a href="https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ljh/issue/archive">https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ljh/issue/archive</a>
10.	Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology (GJRT)	<a href="https://journals.ug.edu.gh/index.php/gjrt/issue/archive">https://journals.ug.edu.gh/index.php/gjrt/issue/archive</a>
11.	Stellenbosch Theological Journal	<a href="https://ojs.reformedjournals.co.za/stj/issue/archive">https://ojs.reformedjournals.co.za/stj/issue/archive</a>

12.	HTS Theological Studies	<a href="https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/issue/archive">https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/issue/archive</a>
13.	International Journal of Social Science Research and Review	<a href="https://ijssrr.com/journal/issue/archive">https://ijssrr.com/journal/issue/archive</a>
14.	Journal for the Study of Religion	<a href="https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jsr/issue/archive">https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jsr/issue/archive</a>
15.	Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Journal (SHE Journal)	<a href="https://e-journal.unipma.ac.id/index.php/SHE/issue/archive">https://e-journal.unipma.ac.id/index.php/SHE/issue/archive</a>
16.	Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations	<a href="https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/scjr/issue/archive">https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/scjr/issue/archive</a>
17.	Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education	<a href="https://kadint.net/archive.html">https://kadint.net/archive.html</a>
18.	All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought (ANUJAT)	<a href="https://anujat.anuc.edu.gh/">https://anujat.anuc.edu.gh/</a>
19.	Impact: Journal of Transformation	<a href="https://journals.aiu.ac.ke/index.php/impact/issue/archive">https://journals.aiu.ac.ke/index.php/impact/issue/archive</a>
20.	American Theological Inquiry	<a href="http://www.journals4free.com/link.jsp?l=25544140">http://www.journals4free.com/link.jsp?l=25544140</a>

### Appendix III: Links to Some Institutional Thesis/Dissertation Repositories

Here are the links for the theses/dissertation repositories of selected tertiary institutions around the world. Click on the link to access these resources. To search on your own, simply type and search the following in Google: “Name of institution + thesis/dissertation repository.” You may also type “etheses” in Google to begin your own search.

No.	Institution	Link
1.	University of Pretoria, South Africa	<a href="https://repository.up.ac.za/community-list">https://repository.up.ac.za/community-list</a>
2.	University of Ghana (UG)	<a href="https://ugspace.ug.edu.gh/handle/123456789/22146">https://ugspace.ug.edu.gh/handle/123456789/22146</a>
3.	Stellenbosch University, South Africa	<a href="https://scholar.sun.ac.za/communities/cf6ab88a-13a2-4e80-94c9-e85030943d9a">https://scholar.sun.ac.za/communities/cf6ab88a-13a2-4e80-94c9-e85030943d9a</a>
4.	Marquette University, USA	<a href="https://epublications.marquette.edu/theo_diss/">https://epublications.marquette.edu/theo_diss/</a>
5.	University of the Free State, South Africa	<a href="https://scholar.ufs.ac.za/communities/5d53b854-18da-4abf-b806-fab4b4a71dc7">https://scholar.ufs.ac.za/communities/5d53b854-18da-4abf-b806-fab4b4a71dc7</a>
6.	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana	<a href="https://ir.knust.edu.gh/communities/fb370a3f-eb44-4942-988f-d011038d7191">https://ir.knust.edu.gh/communities/fb370a3f-eb44-4942-988f-d011038d7191</a>
7.	South African Theological Seminary	MTh: <a href="https://sats.ac.za/thesis-category/mth-theses/">https://sats.ac.za/thesis-category/mth-theses/</a> PhD: <a href="https://sats.ac.za/thesis-category/phd-theses/">https://sats.ac.za/thesis-category/phd-theses/</a>
8.	The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, USA	<a href="https://repository.sbts.edu/handle/10392/693">https://repository.sbts.edu/handle/10392/693</a>

9.	African International University, Kenya	<a href="https://dlibrary.aiu.ac.ke/xmlui/handle/123456789/3">https://dlibrary.aiu.ac.ke/xmlui/handle/123456789/3</a>
10.	Concordia Seminary, USA	<a href="https://scholar.csl.edu/thd/">https://scholar.csl.edu/thd/</a>
11.	St. Paul's University, Kenya	<a href="https://repository.spu.ac.ke/xmlui/handle/123456789/20">https://repository.spu.ac.ke/xmlui/handle/123456789/20</a>
12.	Christian Service University, Ghana	<a href="http://ir.csuc.edu.gh:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/20">http://ir.csuc.edu.gh:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/20</a>
13.	Jomma Kenyatta University, Kenya	<b>MPhil:</b> <a href="https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/handle/123456789/165">https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/handle/123456789/165</a> <b>PhD:</b> <a href="https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/handle/123456789/156">https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/handle/123456789/156</a>
14.	Durham University, UK	<a href="https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/view/departments/DDD32.html">https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/view/departments/DDD32.html</a>
15.	University of South Africa	<a href="https://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/506">https://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/506</a>
16.	Duke Divinity School, USA	<a href="https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/collections/93f63ac9-563e-4f07-9d30-e41f3c1ff067">https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/collections/93f63ac9-563e-4f07-9d30-e41f3c1ff067</a>
17.	University of Cape Coast, Ghana	<a href="https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui/handle/123456789/23">https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui/handle/123456789/23</a>
18.	Luther Seminary, USA	<a href="https://digitalcommons.luthersemin.edu/mth_theses/">https://digitalcommons.luthersemin.edu/mth_theses/</a>
19.	Harvard Divinity School, USA	<a href="https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/13398960">https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/13398960</a>
20.	Universiti Utara Malaysia	<a href="https://etd.uum.edu.my/view/divisions/">https://etd.uum.edu.my/view/divisions/</a>

#### Appendix IV: Databases for Ebooks and Journal Articles

Below are links to some academic books. They are all open access book platforms, meaning you can download books for free.

No.	Database	Link
1.	DOAJ <sup>281</sup>	<a href="https://www.doaj.org/search/journals?source">https://www.doaj.org/search/journals?source</a>
2.	DOAB <sup>282</sup>	<a href="https://directory.doabooks.org/handle/20.500.12854/138762">https://directory.doabooks.org/handle/20.500.12854/138762</a>
3.	Biblical Studies.org.UK	<a href="https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles.php#google_vignette">https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles.php#google_vignette</a>
4.	Google Scholar	<a href="https://scholar.google.com/">https://scholar.google.com/</a>
5.	Google Theological Journals	<a href="https://cse.google.com/cse?cx=018443097211386924752:luwi5uy2qbe#gsc.tab=0">https://cse.google.com/cse?cx=018443097211386924752:luwi5uy2qbe#gsc.tab=0</a>
6.	OAIster	<a href="https://oaister.on.worldcat.org/discovery">https://oaister.on.worldcat.org/discovery</a>
7.	Google Books	<a href="https://books.google.com/">https://books.google.com/</a>
8.	Divinity Archives	<a href="https://divinityarchive.com/handle/11258/628">https://divinityarchive.com/handle/11258/628</a>
9.	PubMed	<a href="https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/">https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/</a>
10.	Noyam Ebooks	<a href="https://noyam.org/e-books/">https://noyam.org/e-books/</a>
11.	Noyam Research Archives	<a href="https://noyam.org/category/ebooks/">https://noyam.org/category/ebooks/</a>
12.	Theological Commons	<a href="https://commons.ptsem.edu/payne">https://commons.ptsem.edu/payne</a>
13.	ResearchGate (General) <sup>283</sup>	<a href="https://www.researchgate.net/">https://www.researchgate.net/</a>
14.	ResearchGate (Personal) <sup>284</sup>	<a href="https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Isaac-Boaheng">https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Isaac-Boaheng</a>

<sup>281</sup> DOAJ stands for directory of open access journals. When you visit the site, you can search for and download journals and articles.

<sup>282</sup> DOAB stands for directory of open access books. These are electronic books you can download. When you visit the site, you can search for books on your subject.

<sup>283</sup> You do not need to register to access resources. You are, however, required to register (for free) to upload your publications.

<sup>284</sup> If you know a particular scholar you can search their names to access their publications alone. This link is for my publications on Researchgate.

15.	JSTOR <sup>285</sup>	<a href="https://www.jstor.org/">https://www.jstor.org/</a>
16.	AJOL <sup>286</sup>	<a href="https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajol/browseBy/category">https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajol/browseBy/category</a>
17.	Online Christian Library	<a href="https://ntslibrary.com/theology-PDF-books.htm">https://ntslibrary.com/theology-PDF-books.htm</a>
18.	PDF drive	<a href="https://www.pdfdrive.com/">https://www.pdfdrive.com/</a>
19.	Zlibrary <sup>287</sup>	<a href="https://z-lib.id/">https://z-lib.id/</a>
20.	SpringerLink	<a href="https://link.springer.com/journals/a/1">https://link.springer.com/journals/a/1</a>



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<sup>285</sup> You may be required to register. It is normally for free.

<sup>286</sup> African Journals OnLine

<sup>287</sup> Zlibrary became inaccessible for some time recently. It is now in full operation. One may be required to register (for free) to download books.

## **Appendix V: On Thesis Writing Assistants Thesis Writing Contractors**

There are a number of agencies/institutions established to assist students in writing their theses. In my view, such a practice fundamentally undermines the integrity and value of academic achievements. Such services promote academic dishonesty and constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and university policies. When students submit work that is not their own, they violate the trust placed in them by their educational institution. This not only compromises the fairness of the academic process but also devalues the hard work and genuine efforts of other students who adhere to academic integrity.

Engaging in these practices has far-reaching consequences. Students caught submitting work written by others face severe academic penalties, including failing grades, suspension, or even expulsion from their programmes. Beyond institutional repercussions, such actions can irreparably damage a student's reputation and future career prospects. Moreover, the skills and knowledge that should have been gained through the process of writing a thesis are lost, leaving the student inadequately prepared for professional challenges.

Students need to commit to producing their own work to develop their skills, knowledge, and understanding fully. Writing a thesis is an integral part of academic growth. It enhances critical thinking, research abilities, and subject mastery. Students may seek assistance in areas like data presentation (for example, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS] software), and editing/proofreading. They should not let anyone write a substantial amount of their thesis for them.

Educational institutions should continue to emphasise the importance of originality and honesty in academic work and provide support and resources to help students succeed without resorting to unethical shortcuts.

## Artificial Intelligence Tools

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the process of thesis writing by offering various tools and applications that can enhance efficiency, accuracy, and overall quality.<sup>288</sup> However, its use comes with both advantages and challenges that make it essential to understand its potential and limitations. AI tools can perform the following functions:

1. **Research assistance:** AI-powered tools can help in conducting literature reviews by quickly scanning and summarising vast amounts of academic papers and articles. This saves time and ensures a comprehensive understanding of the existing body of knowledge.
2. **Writing and editing:** AI-based writing assistants can aid in drafting content by suggesting sentence structures, grammar corrections, and style improvements. They can also help in maintaining consistency and coherence throughout the thesis.
3. **Plagiarism detection:** AI tools can detect similarities with existing works, helping students ensure originality and avoid unintentional plagiarism. These tools compare the text against a vast database of academic and non-academic content.
4. **Data analysis:** AI algorithms can analyse large datasets, identify patterns, and generate insights that would be time-consuming and complex to uncover manually. This is particularly useful for empirical research requiring statistical analysis.
5. **Citation management:** AI-powered citation tools can automatically format references according to different citation styles, manage bibliographies, and track sources, making the process more efficient and error-free.

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<sup>288</sup> What I present below (except the last two paragraphs of the section on “Reflections and Conclusions”) was created using ChatGTP. Parts of it were edited to suit the purpose of this section.

## Advantages

- **Efficiency:** AI tools streamline various aspects of thesis writing, from research to editing. This allows students to focus more on content quality and critical thinking.
- **Accuracy:** Automated grammar and plagiarism checks help maintain high standards of academic integrity and precision.
- **Support:** AI can act as a supportive tool, offering suggestions and guidance, especially for non-native English speakers or students less confident in their writing skills.

## Challenges

- **Dependence:** Over-reliance on AI tools can hinder the development of critical research and writing skills. Students might become less proficient in these areas if they depend too much on technology.
- **Quality and context:** AI tools might not always understand the context or nuances of academic writing. This might lead to inappropriate suggestions or overlooked errors.
- **Ethical concerns:** Using AI to write significant portions of a thesis can raise questions about authorship and academic honesty.

## Reflections and Conclusions

It is not entirely wrong to use AI tools in research. The use of AI tools for citation, data presentation, and grammar checks, for example, is widely accepted as ethical. I agree with ChatGTP that the following are ethical use of AI tools: (i). **Grammarly:** Used to improve grammar, punctuation, and style but not to generate original content; (ii). **Turnitin:** Employed to check for plagiarism and ensure all sources are properly cited; (iii). **EndNote or Zotero:** Used for managing references and citations, ensuring proper formatting; (iv). **IBM Watson or Google Scholar:** Utilized for literature review by providing relevant articles and summarizing content but not for writing the review itself; (v). **SPSS or MATLAB:** Applied in data analysis to perform complex statistical computations accurately.

The use of AI to write significant portions of one's work, however, is unacceptable as it raises questions about the true author of the work. Such a practice does not also help the writer to develop critical thinking and analytical skills as one is made to depend on the intelligence of the technological tool. Academic research is expected to come from one's own critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis of information/data. AI may be used to enhance the process, but they should not take "active" part in the writing process. They may serve as an aid, but not a substitute for genuine intellectual and scholarly effort. The core ideas, analysis, and writing should always come from the student.

The issue of transparency is also key in the present discussion. One has to be transparent about the use of AI tools. If AI tools are used for data analysis, language enhancement, or any such tasks, it is important to acknowledge this in the methodology or acknowledgements section of the thesis. In a situation where an AI tool provides substantial input that influences the content or structure of the thesis, one may consider citing it appropriately. This is similar to acknowledging software tools used in data analysis. We normally see people acknowledging the use of SPSS in their data presentation/analysis.

Finally, I need to emphasise that the issue of the use of AI tools in thesis writing is relatively new and is still being considered by various academic institutions. Therefore, one is advised to seek further advice from their institution and to consult other works on it. I am still reflecting on it and what I have presented here comes from my preliminary analysis. That may not be my final deductions and conclusions after further considerations. I have share my thoughts to trigger further reflections.

## **Appendix VI: Preparing for a Thesis/Dissertation Viva**

The thesis viva, also known as the oral defence, is a crucial final step in the completion of a thesis. It involves presenting and defending your research findings and methodology before a panel of experts.

Proper preparation is essential to ensure a successful viva. Here are some guidelines to help you prepare and attend your viva.

1. **Know your thesis:** Thoroughly read your thesis multiple times to ensure you understand every detail. This includes the research problem, methodology, findings, conclusions and others.
2. **Understand the format:** Familiarise yourself with the viva format and what is expected of you.
3. **Anticipate questions:** Predict potential questions and prepare answers for them (see examples below).
4. **Practice presentation:** Practice summarising your thesis and key findings clearly and concisely.
5. **Mock viva:** Arrange a mock viva with peers or mentors to simulate the experience.
6. **Review literature:** Ensure you are up-to-date with relevant literature and can discuss its relation to your work.
7. **Clarify contributions:** Be ready to explain the significance and originality of your research.
8. **Prepare for challenges:** Think about how you will handle critical questions or challenges to your methodology and conclusions.
9. **Understand broader context:** Be able to discuss the broader implications and applications of your research.
10. **Stay calm and confident:** Develop techniques to stay calm and focused during the viva, such as deep breathing exercises or positive visualisation.

## **Likely Questions at a Viva**

1. Can you summarise your thesis?
2. What motivated you to choose this research topic?
3. What are the main contributions of your research?
4. How does your work differ from previous research in this area?
5. Can you explain your methodology and why you chose it?
6. What were the main challenges you faced during your research?
7. How did you ensure the validity and reliability of your data?
8. What are the key findings of your research?
9. How do your findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge?
10. Were there any unexpected results? How did you address them?
11. Can you discuss the limitations of your study? How may these limitations be addressed by future researchers?
12. How could your research be expanded or improved in the future?
13. What are the practical implications of your research?
14. How do your findings relate to the theoretical framework you used?
15. What recommendations do you have for further research in this area?
16. How would you explain your research to a layperson?
17. How do you plan to publish or disseminate your research findings?
18. What ethical considerations did you take into account during your research?
19. Can you discuss any potential applications of your research?
20. How has your research changed your understanding of the subject?
21. How did you arrive at your research question(s)?
22. What motivated you to pursue this particular area of research?

23. How does your research address a gap in the existing literature?
24. Can you explain how you developed your research hypothesis?
25. How did you ensure the reliability and validity of your data?
26. What statistical methods did you use to analyse your data, and why?
27. How did you select your research participants or sample?
28. Can you explain any anomalies or unexpected results in your findings?
29. How did you ensure your findings are generalisable to a wider population?
30. What impact do you hope your research will have on future studies?
31. How did you manage and organise your data during the research process?
32. What software or tools did you use for data analysis, and why?
33. How did you ensure your research was aligned with your research objectives?
34. What is the most significant finding of your research?
35. How would you summarise your thesis for a non-specialist audience?

## **Appendix VII: Suggested Thesis/Dissertation Topics**

Below are over 400 suggested topics for thesis/dissertation on Religious Studies. Some of them are topics have been gathered from past research works (mostly) with modifications. Others are entirely new. Students are advised to go through, make their own selection and modify it to suit their contextual needs. The topics have been categorised into various religions. More topics can be obtained from my other book *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies*.<sup>289</sup>

### **Topics on Islam**

1. A Phenomenological Study of the Impact of Sharia Law on Modern Society: A Comparative Analysis of its Implementation in Ghana and Nigeria
2. A Critical Examination of the Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence: A Study of the Sources and Methods of Islamic Law
3. The Role of Ijtihad in Islamic Law: A Historical and Contemporary Analysis of its Significance and Challenges
4. The Concept of Tawhid in Islamic Theology: A Study of its Implications for the Nature of God and the Universe
5. Examining the Relationship Between Faith and Reason in Islamic Philosophy
6. The Significance of the Concept of *Ma'ad* in Islamic Eschatology: A Study of its Impact on Muslim Beliefs and Practices
7. The Spread of Islam in Northern Ghana: A Historical Analysis of its Impact on Local Cultures and Societies
8. The Role of Islamic Art and Architecture in the Development of Islamic Culture: A Study of the Influence of Islamic Styles on Global Art

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<sup>289</sup> This book has over 800 suggested research topics. Its DOI is: 10.38159/npub.eb2024601

9. The Impact of Islamic Immigration on the Development of Islamic Communities in the West: A Comparative Analysis of Different Countries
10. The Concept of *Zakat* in Islamic Ethics: A Study of Its Significance and Applications in Modern Sudan
11. The Influence of Islam on Bible Translation in Northern Nigeria
12. A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Fasting in Islamic Morality: A Critical Analysis of its Impact on the Spiritual and Social Lives of Muslims
13. A Study of Social Justice from an Islamic Perspective
14. The Relationship Between Islam and Christianity: A Study of the Historical and Contemporary Issues in Their Interfaith Dialogue
15. The Role of Islamic-Jewish Relations in the Development of Islamic Thought: A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Jewish Influences on Islamic Theology
16. The Significance of Interfaith Dialogue in the Modern World: A Study of its Impact on Muslim-Christian Relations and Global Peace
17. The Role of Madrasas in Islamic Education: A Study of Their Impact on the Development of Islamic Thought and Culture
18. A Study of the Significance of the Concept of *Ta'lim* in Islamic Education
19. The Impact of Modern Educational Methods on Islamic Education: A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Contemporary Approaches
20. Assessing the Role of Women in Islam from Historical and Contemporary Perspectives
21. Investigating the Impact of Sufism on Islamic Culture and Spirituality in Congo
22. Exploring the Origins, Development, and Application of Sharia Law in Modern Societies
23. Examining the Impact of Islamic Art, Architecture and Symbolism Across Selected Epochs of History

24. Investigating the Concept of *Jihad* in Islamic Theology and Practice and its Relevance for Contemporary Chad
25. Assessing the Differences Between Sunni and Shia Islam
26. Exploring the Role of the Quran and Hadith in Shaping Islamic Law
27. Investigating Islam and Science: Historical Contributions and Modern Debates
28. Examining the Influence of Islamic Philosophy on African Thought
29. Assessing Islamic Education: Historical Evolution and Modern Reforms
30. Exploring the Political Impact of Islamic Movements in the 20th and 21st Centuries
31. Investigating Interfaith Dialogue Between Islam and Judaism: A Case Study of Modern Egypt
32. Assessing Islamic Finance: Principles, Practices, and Global Impact
33. A Phenomenological Study of the Role of the Mosque in Islamic Community Life: The Case of Tanzania
34. Exploring Gender Roles in Islam: A Study of Quranic Selected Texts
35. A Comparative Study Between Islamic and Christian Eschatologies
36. Assessing Islam and Human Rights: Compatibility and Controversies
37. Exploring the Socio-economic Impact of Islam on Kenya
38. Investigating Islamic Responses to Modernity: Challenges and Adaptations
39. A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Pilgrimage (Hajj) in Strengthening Islamic Identity and Unity: The Case of South Africa
40. Examining the Historical Evolution of Islamic Jurisprudence
41. Assessing the Impact of Colonialism on Islamic Societies
42. Exploring the Role of Islamic Charity (*Zakat*) in Poverty Alleviation in Liberia

43. Investigating the Influence of Pre-Islamic Arabian Culture on Early Islam
44. Examining the Role of Islamic Scholars in Preserving and Transmitting Knowledge
45. Assessing the Representation of Islam in South African Print Media
46. Exploring the Contributions of Muslim Scientists in the Golden Age of Islam
47. Investigating the Role of Islamic Mysticism in Contemporary Religious Practices
48. Examining the Impact of Globalisation on Islamic Cultural Identity in Chad
49. Assessing the Role of Islamic Political Parties in Modern Ghana
50. Exploring the Use of Digital Technology in the Spread of Islamic Teachings in Contemporary Zambia
51. Examining the Concept of Monotheism in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Study
52. Assessing the Role of Prophets in Islam and Judaism: A Comparative Study
53. Exploring the Ethics of War and Peace in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Study
54. Investigating the Approaches to Social Justice in Islam and Judaism: A Comparative Study
55. Examining the Teachings on Charity in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Study
56. Assessing Perspectives on the Afterlife in Islam and Hinduism: A Comparative Study
57. Exploring the Concept of Pilgrimage in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Study
58. Investigating the Role of Religious Law in Islam and Judaism: A Comparative Study
59. Examining Gender Roles in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Study

60. Assessing Views on Environmental Stewardship in Islam and Buddhism: A Comparative Study
61. Investigating the Historical Relations Between Islam and Christianity
62. Examining the Concept of Free Will in Islamic Theology: Implications for the Contemporary Gambian Society
63. Assessing the Role of Islamic Organisations in Humanitarian Aid: The Case of Libya
64. Exploring the Integration of Islamic Principles in Environmental Sustainability
65. Investigating the Portrayal of Islamic History in Educational Curricula
66. Examining the Impact of Migration on Islamic Communities in Nigeria
67. Assessing the Role of Islamic Literature in Shaping Cultural Narratives
68. Exploring the Relationship Between Islamic Ethics and Business Practices
69. Investigating the Influence of the Islamic Golden Age on Modern Science and Technology
70. Examining the Evolution of Islamic Family Law in Different Cultures
71. Assessing the Role of Islamic Banking in the Global Financial System
72. Exploring the Influence of the Arab Spring on Islamic Political Thought
73. Investigating the Relationship Between Islamic Rituals and Community Cohesion
74. Examining the Impact of Modern Technology on Islamic Educational Practices
75. Assessing the Contributions of Islamic Feminism to Gender Equality
76. Exploring the Influence of Persian Culture on Islamic Art and Literature

77. Investigating the Role of Islamic Endowments (*Waqf*) in Community Development in Kenya
78. Examining the Theological Debates on Predestination and Free Will in Islam
79. Assessing the Role of Islamic Calligraphy in Religious and Secular Art
80. Exploring the Impact of Islamic Teachings on Health and Medicine
81. Investigating the Historical Development of Islamic Political Theory: Lessons for Contemporary Political Figures
82. Assessing the Influence of Islamic Values on Conflict Resolution in Liberia
83. Exploring the Role of Islamic Education in Shaping Moral Values: A Study of Selected Islamic Schools in Sierra Leone
84. Investigating the Interaction Between Islamic and African Legal Systems
85. Exploring the Role of Islamic Poetry in Expressing Spiritual Experiences
86. Investigating the Influence of Andalusian Culture on Islamic Civilisation
87. Examining the Concept of Justice in the Quran: A Study of Selected Texts
88. Assessing the Role of Women as Depicted in the Quran: A Study of Selected Texts
89. Exploring the Quranic Perspective on Environmental Stewardship: A Study of Selected Texts
90. Investigating the Quranic View on Interfaith Relations: A Study of Selected Texts
91. Examining the Concept of Mercy and Compassion in the Quran: A Study of Selected Texts
92. Assessing the Influence of Quranic Teachings on Islamic Jurisprudence: A Study of Selected Texts
93. Exploring the Quranic Verses on Economic Ethics and Fair Trade: A Study of Selected Texts

94. Investigating the Quranic Teachings on Charity and Social Responsibility: A Study of Selected Texts
95. Examining the Role of Prophets in the Quranic Narrative: A Study of Selected Texts
96. Assessing the Quranic Perspective on Education and Knowledge: A Study of Selected Texts
97. Exploring the Concept of Jihad in the Quran: Spiritual and Physical Dimensions: A Study of Selected Texts
98. Investigating the Quranic Guidance on Family Life and Relationships: A Study of Selected Texts
99. Examining the Depiction of Heaven and Hell in the Quran: A Study of Selected Texts
100. Exploring the Role of Quranic Recitation in Islamic Worship: A Study of Selected Texts
101. Investigating the Quranic Approach to Human Rights and Dignity: A Study of Selected Texts
102. Examining the Quranic Teachings on Forgiveness and Reconciliation: A Study of Selected Texts
103. Assessing the Quranic Perspective on Wealth and Poverty: A Study of Selected Texts

### **Topics on Buddhism**

1. The Concept of Karma in Buddhist Philosophy: A Study of its Significance and Applications
2. The Role of Mindfulness in Buddhist Ethics: A Study of its Impact on Mental Health and Well-being in Contemporary Ghana
3. The Significance of the Four Noble Truths in Buddhist Philosophy: A Study of Their Implications for Human Suffering in Africa
4. The Concept of Dukkha in Buddhist Philosophy: A Study of Its Significance and Applications
5. The Role of Compassion in Buddhist Ethics: A Study of Its Impact on Human Relationships and Social Justice

6. The Role of Buddhist Scholars in the Development of Buddhist Thought: A Study of the Contributions of Selected Scholars
7. The Significance of the Eightfold Path in Buddhist Meditation: A Study of Its Implications for Human Suffering
8. The Concept of the Four Immeasurables in Buddhist Meditation: A Study of Their Significance and Applications
9. The Relationship Between Buddhism and Christianity: A Study of the Historical and Contemporary Issues in Their Interfaith Dialogue
10. The Role of Buddhist-Jewish Relations in the Development of Buddhist Thought: A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Jewish Influences on Buddhist Theology
11. The Significance of the Concept of Dharma in Buddhist Education: A Study of Its Implications for the Transmission of Buddhist Knowledge
12. The Impact of Modern Educational Methods on Buddhist Education: A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Contemporary Approaches
13. The Concept of the Mind in Buddhist Psychology: A Study of Its Significance and Applications
14. Examining the Concept of Enlightenment in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism
15. Assessing the Role of Women in Buddhist Monastic Communities
16. Exploring the Influence of Buddhist Philosophy on Modern Mindfulness Practices
17. Investigating the Spread of Buddhism from India to Africa
18. Examining the Impact Teachings of the Four Noble Truths in Contemporary Buddhist Practice
19. Assessing the Impact of Buddhism on Art and Architecture in East Africa
20. Exploring the Role of Meditation in Achieving Nirvana in Buddhism

21. Investigating the Relationship Between Buddhism and Environmentalism
22. Examining the Concept of Karma and Rebirth in Buddhist Thought
23. Assessing the Influence of Zen Buddhism on African Culture
24. Exploring the Practice of Compassion and Loving-kindness in Buddhism
25. Investigating the Role of Rituals and Festivals in Buddhist Communities
26. Examining the Evolution of Buddhist Texts and Scriptures
27. Assessing the Role of Buddhism in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding
28. Exploring the Differences Between Secular Buddhism and Traditional Buddhism
29. Investigating the Impact of Buddhism on Modern Psychological Therapies
30. Examining the Symbolism and Significance of the Bodhi Tree in Buddhism
31. Assessing the Influence of Tibetan Buddhism on Contemporary Spiritual Movements
32. Exploring the Concept of Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*) in Mahayana Buddhism
33. Investigating the Role of Monastic Education in Preserving Buddhist Teachings
34. Examining Buddhist Approaches to Conflict Resolution in Selected African Societies
35. Assessing the Role of Buddhist Ethics in Addressing Corruption in African Governments
36. Exploring Buddhist Contributions to Sustainable Development Practices in African Communities
37. Investigating the Contextual Application of Buddhist Mindfulness Techniques in Mental Health Care in Africa
38. Examining Buddhist Perspectives on Environmental Conservation in African Contexts

39. Assessing the Role of Buddhist NGOs in Providing Humanitarian Aid and Development Assistance in Africa
40. Exploring Buddhist Principles in Promoting Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Tolerance in African Nations
41. Investigating the Role of Buddhist Philosophy in Supporting Education Initiatives in Burkina Faso
42. Examining the Influence of Buddhist Practices in Alleviating Poverty and Promoting Economic Development in Africa
43. Assessing the Impact of Buddhist Meditation Practices in Addressing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Among African Refugees
44. Exploring Buddhist Approaches to Healing and Healthcare in Underserved Communities in Africa
45. Investigating the Integration of Buddhist Values in Governance and Leadership Models in African Nations
46. Examining Buddhist Responses to Social Injustice and Human Rights Violations in Africa
47. Assessing the Role of Buddhist-inspired NGOs in Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Liberia
48. Exploring Buddhist Perspectives on Land Use and Resource Management in African Rural Communities
49. A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Buddhist-inspired Initiatives in Promoting Peacebuilding and Reconciliation in Post-Conflict African Nations
50. Examining Buddhist Contributions to Education and Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Namibia
51. Assessing the Impact of Buddhist Cultural Exchange Programs on Cultural Revitalisation in African Countries
52. Exploring Buddhist-inspired Approaches to Community Development and Social Welfare Programs in Nigeria
53. Investigating the Role of Buddhist-inspired Environmental Movements in Combating Climate Change Challenges in African Regions
54. A Comparative Study of the Concept of Karma in Buddhism and Hinduism

55. Comparing the Teachings of Compassion in Buddhism and Christianity
56. A Comparative Analysis of Meditation Practices in Buddhism and Hinduism
57. Examining the Role of Monasticism in Buddhism and Christianity
58. A Comparative Study of the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism and Jainism
59. Comparing the Concept of Liberation (Moksha/Nirvana) in Buddhism and Hinduism
60. Examining the Ethics of War and Peace in Buddhism and Islam
61. A Comparative Analysis of Rituals and Festivals in Buddhism and Sikhism
62. Comparing Views on the Afterlife in Buddhism and Christianity
63. Examining the Concept of God(s) in Buddhism and Daoism
64. A Comparative Study of Ethics and Morality in Buddhism and Judaism
65. Comparing Views on the Nature of Ultimate Reality in Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta
66. Examining the Role of Scriptures and Texts in Buddhism and Islam
67. A Comparative Analysis of Pilgrimage Practices in Buddhism and Christianity
68. Comparing Views on the Soul and Selflessness in Buddhism and Taoism
69. A Comparative Study of Eschatology (Views on the End Times) in Buddhism and Christianity
70. Examining the Concept of Wisdom and Knowledge in Buddhism and Confucianism
71. A Comparative Analysis of Leadership and Authority Structures in Buddhism and Sikhism
72. Comparing Views on Creation and Cosmology in Buddhism and Indigenous African Religions

73. A Comparative Study of Rituals of Initiation and Rites of Passage in Buddhism and Native American Spirituality
74. Comparing Views on Divine Revelation in Buddhism and Christianity
75. Examining the Concept of Sacrifice in Buddhism and Hinduism
76. Comparative Analysis of Views on Gender and Sexuality in Buddhism and Islam
77. Comparing Views on the Role of Saints and Prophets in Buddhism and Christianity
78. Comparative Study of Mystical Experiences in Buddhism and Sufism
79. Comparing Views on Social Justice and Equality in Buddhism and Jainism
80. A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Community and Communal Practices in Buddhism and Judaism
81. A Comparative Analysis of Views on Human Nature and Ethics in Buddhism and Daoism
82. Comparing Views on the Purpose of Life and Ultimate Goals in Buddhism and Existentialism
83. A Comparative Study of Religious Art and Iconography in Buddhism and Christianity
84. Comparative Analysis of Buddhist Values and African Traditional Governance Systems: Implications for Development
85. Buddhist Ethics and Political Leadership: Case Studies from Africa
86. Exploring the Role of Buddhist Monastic Communities in Promoting Peaceful Elections and Social Harmony
87. Buddhist Approaches to Conflict Resolution and Their Application in African Contexts
88. Assessing the Impact of Buddhist-inspired NGOs on Socioeconomic Development in African Communities
89. A Buddhist Reflection on Environmental Conservation and Sustainable Development in Zambia

90. Examining Buddhist Contributions to Education and Healthcare Initiatives in Africa
91. Buddhist-inspired Practices in Community Development and Poverty Alleviation: The Case of Ghana
92. Assessing the Challenges and Opportunities for Buddhist Engagement in Promoting Democratic Governance and Electoral Integrity in Africa
93. The Concept of Human Dignity in Buddhist Ethics and Its Application in Conflict Zones in Nigeria
94. Comparative Study of Buddhist and International Human Rights Standards: A Case Study of Zambia
95. Examining Buddhist Contributions to Restorative Justice Practices and Their Impact on Human Dignity
96. A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Buddhist Ethics in Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Rights
97. Buddhist Monastic Practices and Their Influence on Human Dignity and Social Justice
98. Buddhist Perspectives on Freedom of Religion and Belief: Challenges and Solutions in Pluralistic Societies
99. Comparative Study of Buddhist Scriptures: Analysing the Differences Between Theravada and Mahayana Perspectives on Enlightenment
100. Exploring the Role of the Heart Sutra in Mahayana Buddhism: Its Influence on Doctrine and Practice

### **Topics on Christianity**

1. Exploring the Historical Development of Christian Doctrine on the Trinity
2. Analysing the Role of Women in Early Christian Communities
3. A Comparative Study of Salvation Concepts in Catholicism and Protestantism
4. Examining the Influence of St. Augustine's Theology on Western Christianity

5. Examining the Impact of the Protestant Reformation on Church and Society in Britain
6. Analysing the Evolution of Christian Art and Architecture in Medieval Europe
7. Exploring Christian Views on Social Justice and Equality
8. A Comparative Analysis of Eucharistic Theology in Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism
9. Examining the Role of Missionary Movements in the Spread of Christianity in Africa
10. Examining the Relationship Between Christianity and Colonialism in British India
11. Examining the Significance of Biblical Interpretation in Contemporary Christian Ethics
12. A Comparative Study of Christian Views on Marriage and Family across Denominations
13. Exploring Christian Responses to Modern Science and Technological Advances
14. Analysing Christian Contributions to Education and Literacy in Benin
15. A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Christian Theology in Environmental Ethics and Sustainability
16. Examining Christian Approaches to Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation in Sudan
17. A Comparative Analysis of Christian and Islamic Perspectives on Jesus
18. Exploring the Role of Music and Hymnody in Christian Worship Practices
19. Analysing the Impact of Christian Revivals on Social and Political Change
20. The Role of Christian Churches in Community Development and Welfare in Accra
21. A Comparative Study of Christian and Buddhist Approaches to Meditation
22. Examining Christian Views on Human Rights and Dignity

23. The Influence of Christian Ethics on Business Practices and Corporate Social Responsibility
24. Exploring Christian Views on Peacebuilding and Reconciliation
25. A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Women in Leadership Positions within Christian Churches
26. A Comparative Analysis of Christian and Jewish Perspectives on the Old Testament
27. The Impact of Christian Ethics on Medical and Bioethical Issues
28. Exploring Christian Eschatology: Views on the Second Coming and End Times
29. Analysing Christian Perspectives on Wealth and Poverty
30. A Comparative Study of Christian and Hindu Approaches to Religious Pluralism
31. The Impact of Christian Monasticism on European Culture and Spirituality
32. A Comparative Analysis of Christian and Secular Approaches to Bioethics
33. Exploring Christian Views on Just War Theory and Pacifism
34. The Role of Christian Missionaries in Global Development and Humanitarian Aid
35. A Comparative Study of Christian and Islamic Philosophical Perspectives on God
36. Analysing the Influence of Christianity on the Formation of Western Legal Systems
37. Exploring the Role of Saints and Martyrs in Christian Devotion and Popular Piety
38. A Comparative Analysis of Christian and Indigenous African Religious Practices
39. Exploring the Impact of Christian Ethics on Political Governance
40. A Phenomenological Study of the Christian Responses to Issues of Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Society

41. Examining the Influence of Christian Art and Iconography on Cultural Identity
42. A Comparative Study of Christian and Eastern Orthodox Views on Salvation
43. Exploring Christian Approaches to Mental Health and Well-being
44. Christian Contributions to the Philosophy of Education and Pedagogy
45. Examining the Role of Christian Ethics in Environmental Conservation and Sustainability
46. A Comparative Analysis of Christian and Hindu Perspectives on Divine Revelation
47. Exploring Christian Mystical Traditions and Their Relevance Today
48. Christian Perspectives on Technology and Ethical Responsibility
49. Examining the Impact of Christian Social Movements on Civil Rights and Social Justice
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100. Exploring Approaches to Gender Roles and Equality in Christianity and African Traditional Religion

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