

Re-Visioning the Fabric of an Empirical Research: From Conceptualization to Conclusion

Professor Augustine Nwoye

Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Fulbright Scholar, Discipline of Psychology, School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Despite the current proliferation of eminent research textbooks designed to give guidance and direction to research students on a variety of methods of conducting research, most of such textbooks deal with so many things at a time that the actual procedures and processes for successful academic research writing are not always attended. Such omission is regrettable since what research students practically need go beyond the mere fact of getting to know the details about the various research methods and statistics for doing academic research. There is also the need to assist them on how to deal with the actual craft and procedures for accomplishing their own research. The major aim of this article is to render clarity to the specific processes and procedures for conducting an excellent academic research, from conceptualization of the problem to the final stages of reporting and discussing and interpreting of the findings.

Keywords: Academic Research Writing; Empirical Research; Doing a Literature Review; Materials and Methods; Results of the Study.

Introduction

Although there are presently so many great research textbooks (such as Neuman, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Babbie, 1995; Bailey, 1996; Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Pandey & Pandey, 2015; Booth, Colomb, Williams, et al. 2024; Yin, 2018; & Trafford & Leshem, 2008) available to give guidance and direction to research students on a variety of methods of conducting research, most of such textbooks deal with so many things at a time that the actual procedures and processes for a successful academic research writing are not always attended. Such omission is regrettable since what research students practically need often go beyond the mere fact of getting to know the details about the various research methods and statistics available. For, after mastering the various methods of conducting research, they would also need to be assisted on how to deal with the actual processes and procedures for accomplishing their own research. What is intended in this article is to draw the attention of the

interested research student to the key action decisions and procedures that facilitate successful planning and execution of an academic research. The specific objective is to render clarity to the general processes and procedures for conducting an academic research, *from conceptualization of the problem to the stage of reporting and discussing the results of the study*. And to these we now turn.

1. Topic Identification, Selection, Reformulation and Delineation

Under this heading what is meant is that in the birth of any empirical research of an academic nature, a number of possible topics are usually conceived of, and deliberated upon (interiorly) by the researcher, but only one or two of them will eventually be recognized as worthwhile for further thought and action, in terms of being proposed to the research Supervisor for further illumination and judgment about which of the remaining

options to settle on as the title of the proposed study. In responding to such a need, the research supervisor, before making a decision on which topic to encourage the student to focus on eventually, must typically put a number of things into consideration, including the prospective topic's: (1) researchability, (2) originality, (3) sustainability, and (4) overall significance in the economy of the candidate's discipline (Phillip & Pugh, 1994; Holloway, 1997; Neuman, 2000).

Should any of the proposed topics survive this stage of scrutiny and the above four critical conditions for good research topic selection, the supervisor will further assist the candidate in reformulating and sharpening the topic with a view to ensuring that the chosen topic will enjoy the qualities of *clarity, brevity, contextualization, and delineation of key variables* of interest to the research. The candidate's research supervisor takes these decisions and actions influenced by the governing idea that in thesis topic captioning, the shorter the title the better the effect, as long as the key elements of a standard research topic are present: *subject area, study variables, target population, and geography of the study*. Thus in a topic like *Mate Selection Preferences and Perceptions of Tanzanian University Students* (word count: 9) the above mentioned characteristics can be seen to stand out: *Subject area* (mate selection), *study variables* (preferences and perceptions), *target population* (university students) and *geography of the study* (Tanzania).

With this said, a related comment is needed regarding the informed advice that as much as possible one should opt for a topic that has a future in one's field. That is, a topic that belongs to an area of research in one's field that is viable for launching one into the world of advanced and notable scholarship after the degree has been earned. This is particularly crucial if one is pursuing a doctoral programme (Phillips & Pugh, 1994; Trafford & Leshem, 2018; Booth, Colomb, Williams et al., 2024; Bailey, 1996; Babbie, 1995; Pandey & Pandey, 2015).

Additionally, some authorities (Phillips and Pugh, 1994) have further suggested that a topic of research particularly at a doctoral level should be classified as original only if it will enable the researcher to accomplish the following:

- Do empirically based work that has not been done before;
- Use already known ideas, practices and approaches (e.g. survey methodology) but with a new interpretation;
- Bring new evidence to bear on an old issue or problem;

- Create a new synthesis that has not been done before;
- Apply something done in another country successfully in one's own country;
- Apply a technique usually associated with one area to another;
- Be cross-disciplinary by using different methodologies;
- Look at areas that people in the discipline have not looked at before; and
- Add to knowledge in a way that has not previously been done before.

The above indications show why it was pointed out earlier on that the quality of originality is one of the principal characteristics of an academic research topic, particularly at the doctoral level. The dimensions highlighted by Phillips and Pugh (1994) above are important as they have tried to offer an operational definition of what is meant by the notion of originality in academic research.

2. The Importance of a good Introduction to the Thesis

After the topic of the study has been firmly selected, it becomes the task of the researcher to develop that topic further by presenting a good introduction of the thesis to the reader. To be able to accomplish this, the researcher must keep at the back of his or her mind the general principle that an academic thesis or a postgraduate research, at least according to the 7th Edition of the Research Guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA), begins with an *Introduction*, which incidentally is the title of **Chapter One** of the thesis or dissertation and ends with a *Conclusion* which is the name given to the final Chapter of the thesis or dissertation; or as in the APA style, **Chapter 5**.

Now, because most students tend to get confused about what should constitute the introductory section of a thesis, I have taken the liberty to present below, with allowance for variation in research procedures from fields other than the social sciences, the APA's (2019) view of the standard constituents of the introductory chapter of a thesis.

The structure of such an introductory chapter is presented below as follows, each constituent, being made to sit in the order in which it normally sits in a typical Chapter One of a thesis report, as follows:

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1.0 Background of the Study

1.2.0 Statement of the Problem

- 1.3.0 Purpose of the Study
- 1.4.0 Objectives of the Study
- 1.5.0 Research Questions
- 1.6.0 Significance of the Study
- 1.7.0 Assumptions/Prospective/Hypotheses of the Study
- 1.8.0 Scope and Delimitations of the Study
- 1.9.0 Operational Definition of Terms

A quick review of the above structural placement of the constituents of the first Chapter of an academic thesis or dissertation draws attention to one important point. And that is that the name of Chapter One of a thesis (Introduction) should not be confused with the name of the first part of that Chapter, namely *Background of the study*. To call that first part of Chapter One 'Introduction' as some students tend to do, is to commit a *genus error*. That is the error of mistaken the tree for the forest. This is because the entire nine components of Chapter One as given above are meant to work together to give a comprehensive Introduction to the thesis. None of them operating alone could suffice to do that job; but each has something vital to offer in the successful crafting of an academic research *Introduction*.

Similarly, it needs to be mentioned that the fundamental aim of the 'Background of the Study' section is to *establish the inspirational impulse* that motivated the researcher to take up the study in the first place. But it, of course, does more than that. This is because the *Background of the study* also works to *contextualize* the study by giving recognition to the story behind the study as well as the trends and perspectives of previous investigators on the topics that are related to the subject of the study. Starting that way is assumed beneficial in that it helps the researcher to establish from the word go, where the present study stands in relation to previous efforts on the same or similar topic; and why despite the existence of any one or two or more notable studies on same or similar theme, there is still space and justification for one's own study. To achieve this intended effect, an aspect of one's study background must challenge the structures of thought that have been dominating, for so long, the attention of previous investigators on the subject of the investigation; giving rise to a regrettable one-sided emphasis in the field; and thus a limitation which the study being proposed is planned to address.

The above observations mean that the task of the 'Background of the Study' in a thesis or an academic research is to prepare the tone and the context for effective statement of the problem of the study, which in practical terms does entail *the act of establishing an omission or a gap* in the area of one's interest, for which

one's study is being designed to close. For instance, Carol Denard, in trying to establish the need for a study on the role of the American South in Toni Morrison's novels began with the following observation: While scholarship devoted to the fiction of Toni Morrison is expanding, until recently, critics have given little attention (which, for her, is an omission) to the role of the American South in Morrison's novels. Similarly, Gergen and Gergen (2008) in their effort to establish the basis for their work on positive aging started with the indication that: "As the aging population expands, concern among scholars, policy planners, and ordinary people tends to focus on the decline and degeneration that seem inevitable with aging. A powerful theoretical framework stresses the importance of disengagements as the major outcome of the aging process.... Almost no attention is paid to the years of potential growth and development that lie ahead for most people over 65."

Indeed, another important point to make in this connection is that every academic research or thesis or dissertation, has both a *vision* and a *telos*. This is what is addressed under the 'purpose of the study' section of the Introduction to the thesis or dissertation. In this regard, the word *telos* is taken from the Greek word for *purpose*, which points attention to the expected target of the research or the study's aim or what to be achieved after the study has been completed. In contrast, the Study's specific objectives in their various stated dimensions are meant to highlight the practical actions or the process steps which the researcher plans to take to ensure that the purpose of the study is achieved. In this way, 'the purpose of the study' is the aspect of the research process that drives the entire study. This again means that essentially the *Purpose of the Study* is different from the Objectives of the Study; the latter operates as a means in the service of the former.

Given the above, a related point to make is that usually the number of Research Questions should tally with the number of Research Objectives. This is because it is through the data generated by the research questions that the objectives of the study are achieved. To give further illumination to this angle of thought in the economy of writing of a good Chapter One of a thesis, Punch (2005) opines that having good research questions is recommended which by characterization are: (1) *clear*, and therefore easily understood, and unambiguous; (2) *specific* (that is, their concepts are at a specific enough level to connect to data indicators); (3) *answerable* (one can easily see what data are required to answer them and how the data will be obtained); (4) *interconnected* (that is, they are related to each other in some meaningful way; and (5) *substantively relevant* (meaning that such questions are typically interesting and worthwhile for

the investment of research effort. Furthermore, as the nature of the research questions actually determines the actual data one gathers during the study process, it is generally agreed that research question development is an important segment of the introductory part of the thesis. And because of their importance in the overall economy of the research outcome there should be a close fit between one's research questions and one's research methods (Punch, 2005; Neuman, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000).

Similarly, the key assumptions/prospective hypotheses of the study should also be clearly delineated. Also the 'Significance of the study' which highlights the need for and the expected contributions of the study must be clearly be highlighted. Yet, at the research proposal stage, the entire argument for the significance or the value of the study should not be rendered in the past tense as if the study has already been completed.

Finally, as far as the first chapter of the thesis is concerned, it needs to be remembered that the 'Definition of terms' section in that Chapter is not concerned with giving of dictionary definition of terms. Rather what is expected is operational definition of terms, which should draw attention to the way a particular word or concept is taken to mean in one's study. It also stands for the specific meaning one has decided to give to a seemingly common term in the context of one's study.

3. Excellent Literature Review as Evidence of the Candidate's Mastery of the field under Study

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

- 2.1.0 Introduction
- 2.2.0 Theoretical Framework
- 2.3.0 Review of Related Foreign Studies
- 2.4.0 Review of Related Local Studies
- 2.5.0 Summary of Reviewed Literature
- 2.6.0 Research/Operational Hypotheses
- 2.7.0 Conceptual Framework

Under the theme of 'Literature Review', the first point to draw attention to is the view credited to Chris Hart (2003, p. 27) who in his writings has suggested that the review of literature at the doctoral (as much as at the lower) level should serve, at least, the following purposes:

- Distinguishing what has been done from what needs to be done;
- Discovering important variables relevant to the thesis topic;

- Synthesizing and gaining a larger perspective to the study topic;
- Establishing the context of the topic or problem;
- Rationalizing the significance of the problem;
- Understanding the structure of the subject (demonstrated in the satisfactory review of related theories, studies and writings informing the study);
- Enhancing and acquiring the subject vocabulary;
- Placing the research in a historical context, demonstrating considerable familiarity with state-of-the-art developments: eg. traditional/modern
- Successfully identifying key landmark studies, and selecting what was considered to be key sources and authors.

The above indications mean that a research student is expected in the course of his or her literature review to ably distinguish what has been done and what has been left undone in his or her area of study, and in that way to adequately carve out a vital space or room for his or her own study. To succeed in doing this it is expected that the candidate's map of his or her literature review must be comprehensive enough to cover the major variables of interest to the study. This also means that in one's literature review there should be evidence of movement from local/national, to continental and to international research and writings; and from general theories/frameworks, to specific empirical studies focusing on aspects very close or similar to one's own study. In particular, a review of literature for an academic degree should be distinguished from that intended for a manuscript preparation for an academic journal.

In this regard, the key issue to note is that while the use of the 'laundry list approach' is permitted as an option for literature review in preparation of a manuscript for a journal publication, such an approach is considered inadequate for use in conducting a review of literature for an academic degree, such as a PhD. This is because the laundry list approach is the practice in which the researcher merely strings together various authors (surnames) and their works (by highlighting their dates of publication) in one summary statement or critical paragraph. Such an approach to literature review is allowed in preparing research articles where, due to lack of space, there is no opportunity to expand on the review of each work cited (Trafford & Leshem, 2018; Phillips & Pugh, 1994).

Indeed, another basis for the discouragement of the laundry list approach in a PhD thesis literature review in particular, is that previous works on a given problem are not always of the same merit vis-à-vis the interests

of one's study. And some external assessors or readers may wish to know whether those authors that have been strung together are researchers, or theorists, or textbook authors? And if they are researchers, it will become important to know which kind of researchers: faculty members or academic research students working for a university degree? And if some of them are not degree student researchers, it would be interesting to ask which research population they had studied to come to the conclusions they did? And the different perspectives which such studies brought to one's study.

Also, in researches intended for an academic degree, some of the works cited need to be reviewed in greater detail than others, highlighting the topic, the purpose, the key questions investigated, the design, the study sample and sample size, instrumentation, data analysis techniques, the major results emanating from the study, and a critique of these as much as necessary. This emphasis arises from the fact that an assessor or an interested reader may like to know how one's work and perspective is different from any of the works of previous investigators; in which case, the works of such investigators cannot all be lumped together in one summary line of critical comment.

Similarly, where it is observed that most of the researches and writings reviewed have come mainly from abroad, the critical question will then be: what of works on this or other related topic that are done in other countries abroad outside those already covered in the review? And who are the major scholars involved in this regard? Such observations as these suggest that one's literature review must give recognition to studies on the topic done by scholars from a wide international perspective.

As mentioned earlier, where such works do exist, they should not be lumped together with researchers operating from outside of Europe, thereby marginalizing their significance as regional precursors to one's own study. The reason for this is that because of their closeness to the current study they deserve an extended treatment to demonstrate where they took off, and where they ended, and the kind of things they left undone that encourages the need for one's own study.

In addition, it needs to be mentioned that before one can convince any external assessor that previous works that seem relevant to one's own area of focus are not really relevant to one's study, and do not need to be reviewed, one needs to prove this by reviewing them. In this way, the candidate will be able to show that s/he is aware of all important studies that are available in his/her area of research here in Europe, and how they relate to, or differ from, his/her own effort.

To successfully address these concerns, a separate section, as indicated in the sample structure of Chapter 2

given above, should be created in one's Literature Review Chapter to give in-depth attention to International research and writings that have any bearing to one's research interest; with a view to highlighting what they have done and how their efforts differ from those intended for the current study. Of course, one's scrutiny of such existing literature must be maturely executed, including an attempt to achieve a reasonable balance of judgment in the sensitive/controversial sections of the Review.

All in all, there should be an indication in going through one's literature review that one has done enough general reading to familiarize oneself with the topic; and that one has indeed thought large and wide about the scope of one's research. To fulfill this requirement one must be able to link the literature information with the objectives of one's study, raising pertinent questions worthy of further investigation at appropriate instances in the Review. Furthermore, some authorities suggest that one's literature review should be capped with a summary section intended to bring together all that has been discovered in the course of the review, including the way in which the results of the review have further revealed evidence of the strong justification for one's study; and in particular that **both foreign and local research** relevant to one's have been reviewed.

Similarly, the end of one's review should give opportunity for emergence of research hypotheses, derived from suggestions arising from the views of previous investigators concerning the direction in which answers to one's research may need to go for better exploration of one's research questions. The **Conceptual Framework** of the study brings the rear of the entire review, placing in an organogram format the nature of the interrelationships and links that exist between and within the various variables of the study.

Now, one final comment on the subject of literature review. And that is with regard to the notion of theoretical framework of a study. The theoretical framework of the study is the area of the study in which an attempt is made to give due recognition to efforts which scholars have made to conceptualize and explain and develop the important constructs and variables of interest to one's study. In this regard, where one's study involves a theory testing or theory verification study, the usual habit of researchers is to start early to introduce the theory some of whose claims are planned to be subjected to test in one's study. In that case, the appropriate placement of the theoretical framework in such a study will be in Chapter One of the study. On the other hand, where one's research involves a theory generation study, or what is now regarded as grounded theory research, the seating of the theoretical

framework of the study is as indicated in the sample structure given above, namely Chapter 2 of the study, as part of the Literature Review. Finally, a careful reader must have noted that unlike in Chapter I, Chapter 2 is started off with a short introduction that gives the menu of what to expect in the entire chapter.

With this said some comments on the requirements for the third chapter of the thesis, namely Methodology will be undertaken in the pages below. And to this we now turn.

4.0 Methodology as Foundation to the Candidate's Contribution to the Field

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

- 3.1.0 Introduction
- 3.2.0 Design of the Study
- 3.3.0 Location of the Study
- 3.4.0 Study Population
 - 3.4.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
- 3.5.0 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size
- 3.6.0 Research Instrument
 - 3.6.1 Validity and Reliability/Equivalent
 - 3.6.2 Pilot Study
- 3.7.0 Data Analysis
- 3.8.0 Ethical Considerations

As seen from the Chapter structure presented above, Chapter 3 of a study often captioned Materials and Methods by researchers in the Sciences, is concerned with an attempt to effect a number of decisions that deal with such issues as the nature of the materials and procedures to be followed in conducting the research in such a way that appropriate answers to the questions of interest to the study could be obtained. In this regard the first issue to worry about is ability to name the appropriate design for the study: A cross-sectional survey? a correlational survey?, a case study?, or a controlled experimental research design?, etc.

If one successfully responds to this question, a related concern would then arise as to whether to use just a single design or instrument for the study, or rather to adopt a triangulation methodology involving the use of several kinds of methods or data collection techniques to study one's topic; the most common type of triangulation being data triangulation, where the study uses a variety of data sources (questionnaire and focus group discussion) in gaining answers to the research questions of the study (Booth, Colomb, Williams, et al., 2024; Pandey & Pandey, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Kvale, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Apart from design issues,

other important concerns in this chapter is the related question of how to constitute an appropriate sample size (the rule often being the higher the population the smaller the sample and vice versa) for the study; and at end of the study, out of this, how many really took part in the study? representing a total of what percentage of the target population?

In addition, some inclusion and exclusion criteria need to be decided and put forward to justify why one particular segment of the target population is selected and not the other and the ethical considerations in support of these decisions (Wassenaar, 2006; Emmanuel, Wendler & Grady, 2008). The same process of accounting is also followed in explaining why a given study location is targeted for study instead of another. Finally, like in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 begins with a short, often one paragraph introduction, intended to give the reader a statement of the menu of issues to be addressed in the entire Chapter. And a similar trend is observed in the remaining Chapters: 4 & 5.

5. The Results Chapter Not the Same as the Discussion Chapter

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS OF THE STUDY

- 4.1.0 Introduction
- 4.2.0 Descriptive Analysis of Distribution of Respondents
- 4.3.0 Presentation of Results/Findings Research Question by Research Question
- 4.4.0 Inferential Analysis of Results, Hypothesis by Hypothesis (Where Applicable)
- 4.5.0 Summary of Findings

Chapter 4 is the section of the thesis report that presents to the reader the Results or the findings of the study. For this reason the APA (2019) research guidelines recommends that the chapter be entitled as given above: **Results of the Study**. As far as that chapter is concerned what is expected is that the candidate's research results be clearly presented; with the research questions investigated or the hypotheses tested being used as the organizing framework for the presentation. Such a strategy is recommended as it helps to improve the sequence and coherence of the presentation.

The error to avoid is the tendency to engage in full-scale bottom table discussion and interpretation of results within the same chapter. This habit, which is permitted in preparing manuscripts for journal publication, is discouraged in the formal presentation of results or findings of a thesis work. This is because incorporating the discussion and interpretation of results in that same chapter acts to congest the chapter and to block the flow

of results' presentation, leading to confusion. It also makes redundant the role of the next Chapter which is dedicated as a formal place where space for discussion and interpretation of results is devoted. When this procedure is not heeded, Chapter 5 ends up becoming a few-pages-Chapter, containing merely the Summary and Conclusions, and Implications and Recommendations of the Study; all these being brought to the attention of the reader when the thought flow of the discussion and interpretation of the study have been hastily presented in a squeezed form in Chapter 4.

To avoid this, Chapter 4 should present only the substantive results or findings of the study based on the research questions investigated and/ or the hypotheses tested (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Similarly, to prevent the results' presentation from being too wordy and to allow equitable data flow in that chapter, what is permitted is just the bottom Table summary of results and trends indicated in the Table of data under attention.

In the 'Summary of the Results/Findings' section of the Chapter, the researcher must restrain his or her urge to go overboard in taking much time to speak to the data. Summary of general trends of the results is what is expected. The final statement of the chapter should contain the information that the full discussion and interpretation of the results of the study will be undertaken in Chapter 5, now to follow.

6. The Conclusion Chapter as the Discussion Chapter according to APA Guidelines

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

5.1.0 Introduction

5.2.0 Discussion of Results, Research Question by Research Question

5.3.0 Summary of the Study

5.4.0 Findings/Conclusions/Implications of the study

5.5.0 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

5.6.0 Limitations of the Study

5.7.0 Recommendations for further Research

In discussing the findings of the study in this chapter, the chapter starts with an introductory menu as mentioned earlier, containing such statements as the following: "In this chapter, the results or findings of the present study will be discussed and interpreted. The discussion will be organized according to the research questions/ hypotheses investigated; and the interpretation will be conducted with attention to linking the present findings to related trends in the literature reviewed. The summary of the study, conclusions and implications as well as recommendations for policy and practice and for further research will also be undertaken."

The tone of this introductory menu shows that in the course of the discussion and interpretation of one' study results effort is made to link or situate one's findings in the context of the existing literature: Who did one's study corroborate, and who did they differ from? And how does one respond to or explain the basis for the variation in the findings where there is no corroboration between ones and those by others noted in the literature. Where there is a difference, the researcher must grapple to respond to the hidden question on why should we pay attention to one's own results rather than to those of others with results contrary to ones? Or how does one explain the variation when the literature information comes against one's own findings?

These are the key issues to attend to in the Discussion and Interpretation of results' section of one's Chapter 5. And this is where the candidate is given the opportunity to demonstrate that s/he is aware of what is going on in the thesis and that s/he can defend in favour of the direction which his or her findings have taken contrary to other existing trends. A Section on 'Summary of the study' is crucial which should reiterate the aim of the study, and the materials and methods used in conducting the study, and the study's key findings (APA, 2019).

The Summary of the study Section is thus often seen as a kind of an extended abstract of the study report. It is equally seen as a section that gives the researcher the chance to really show off the importance, meaning, and relevance and originality of the study.

7. The Adequacy/Accuracy of the References as part of the Structure of the Thesis Report

The important point to make under the theme of 'Study References' is that there should be commendable effort to ensure that all the works cited in the body of the report are entered or listed in the References section of the report. Similarly, the referencing style adopted must fully conform to the current referencing style followed by one's discipline and sanctioned by one's department. For those in psychology and the related disciplines such as educational psychology, psychiatry, sociology and social work, the acceptable referencing style is the APA style. In following the APA style the most important thing is to remember that there are specific ways of making reference to a *journal article*, a *newspaper article*, a *book*, a *contribution to an edited book*, a *government report* and an *unpublished thesis*. Important examples of how to work out each of these are found in the latest (the 7th) Edition of the Publication Manual of American Psychological Association.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, let me make some one or two comments on the issue of how to present one's study Abstract. In this regard, an important observation to make is that a comprehensive or standard research abstract should draw attention to, and contain information on five key areas of the research report: 1) the purpose/design of the study, often including the key questions investigated, (2) study population/sample, and summary of materials and methods, (3) the principal results of the study, (4) the implications of findings and (5) one or two recommendations for policy and practice. The last sentence of the abstract is often expected to include an indication that recommendations have also been made on the need for further research.

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