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What is the Difference Between the Theoretical and the Conceptual Framework?



Patrick Regoniel

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Many students, both in the undergraduate and graduate levels, have difficulty discriminating the theoretical from the conceptual framework. This requires a good understanding of both frameworks in order to conduct a good investigation. This article explains the two concepts in easily understandable language. Read on to find out.

Many graduating college students and even graduate students have difficulty coming up with the conceptual framework and the theoretical framework of their thesis, a required section in **thesis writing** that serves as the students' map on their first venture into research. The conceptual framework is almost always confused with the theoretical framework of the study.

What is the difference between the conceptual and the theoretical framework?

A conceptual framework is the researcher's idea on how the research problem will have to be explored. This is founded on the theoretical framework, which lies on a much broader scale of resolution. The theoretical framework dwells on time tested theories that embody the findings of numerous investigations on how phenomena occur.

The theoretical framework provides a general representation of relationships between things in a given phenomenon. The conceptual framework, on the other hand, embodies the specific direction by which the research will have to be undertaken. Statistically speaking, the conceptual framework describes the relationship between **specific variables** identified in the study. It also outlines the input, process and output of the whole investigation. The conceptual framework is also called the research paradigm.

Examples of the Theoretical and the Conceptual Framework

The difference between theoretical framework and conceptual framework can be further clarified by the following examples on both concepts:

- **Theoretical Framework:** Stimulus elicits response.

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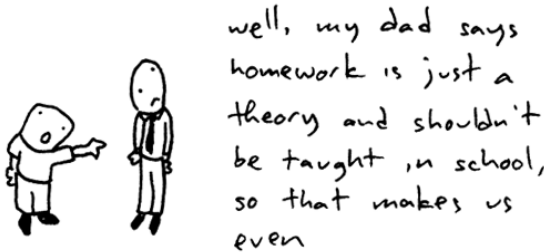
ARTICLE KEYWORDS

- conceptual
- conceptual framework
- framework
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Notice in the illustrative example that the theoretical framework basically differs from the conceptual framework in terms of scope. The theoretical framework describes a broader relationship between things. When stimulus is applied, response is expected. The conceptual framework is much more specific in defining this relationship. The conceptual framework specifies the variables that will have to be explored in the investigation. In this example, the variable "teaching method" represents stimulus while

the "students' academic performance" represents the response. The variables make clear the kind of statistical treatment that will have to be used to analyze the relationship.



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How can students come up with their theoretical and conceptual framework?

In order to come up with their own set of theoretical and conceptual framework that will guide the conduct of the research, students have to [review literature](#) pertaining to their chosen research topic. Students need to read a lot and find out what has been studied so far in their respective fields and come up with their own synthesis of the literature. They should look for gaps in knowledge and identify what questions need to be answered or what problems need to be given solutions. Thus, they will be able to formulate their own conceptual framework to serve as guide in their research venture.

For more information on examples of variables, visit [simplyeducate.me](#), a free website devoted to research and statistics topics.

©Patrick Regoniel 29 August 2010 The Theoretical Framework | The Conceptual Framework



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This article has helped me..thnx alot

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Thank you very much. i feel much better after reading your easily understandable article.

Posted 50 months ago



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Welcome Mohamed for the feedback. I'm glad this article served its purpose.

Posted 50 months ago



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Bless you! Thanks!

Posted 45 months ago



Sam Giks

The simplest understanding one could ever get on this issue. Thanks

Posted 39 months ago



NIK JAH NIK KADIR

I am using an Integrated Behaviour Model as my theoretical framework and developed my own conceptual framework from there. I hope I am doing the right way in my research.

Posted 35 months ago



Abubakar Usman

Give credit where it is due. This is the simplest explanation I have come across in relation to framework. It will be great also if you could explain what they call analytical framework or framework of analysis. Thank you

Posted 24 months ago



Krishnan Isai Amuthan

Lovely. Could understand better.

Posted 21 months ago



Tunji Bashorun

Thank you for better and understandable approach of explanation about differences between theoretical framework and conceptual framework. I have a great concern on another name given to conceptual framework which is "research paradigm". My understanding of research paradigm is the philosophical foundation of research like interpretive, positivism. I hope referring the conceptual framework as research paradigm will create confusion.

Posted 21 months ago



jose mari lee

This is very informative for a graduate students like me coz most often, these two concepts are not being clearly differentiated in the school, they are simply taught but without further application. Thank you so much Mr. Patrick R.

Posted 19 months ago



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can i use both conceptual framework and theoretical framework in me research work?

Posted 17 months ago



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can i use both conceptual and theoretical framework together?

Posted 17 months ago



Cornè Kruger

Thanks - this makes it so much easier after all the different explanations I have read. This makes sense

Posted 17 months ago



chukwu princewill

Thanks for the article, felt much better after reading it.

Posted 16 months ago



ZAKHE DLAMINI

This is good Patrick.

Posted 15 months ago



Israel Lewte

Very informative article. Thank you!

Posted 11 months ago



Effie Kay

Thank you so much. That was very helpful!!! I needed some clarifications and I think got it here. God Bless you.

Posted 5 months ago



Effie Kay

Hi Patrick, If in the course of writing my conceptual framework, I introduce some references, does it still serve as a conceptual framework and not a theoretical framework?

Posted 5 months ago

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