

APPROACHES TO BACKGROUND WRITING AND THE DERIVATION OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES/HYPOTHESES/QUESTIONS

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Introduction...

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- Once a research problem has been identified and formulated, then its study background needs to be written.
- The background of the study is that first part of the research provided in the introduction section (of a thesis/dissertation or paper) to lay the foundation of a given study.
- According to Labaree (2009), the statement of the background should indicate the:
 1. Root of the problem being studied;
 2. The appropriate context of the problem in relation to theory, research, and/or practice;
 3. The scope of the problem, and the extent to which previous studies have successfully investigated the problem, or not;
 4. More emphasis should be placed in identifying where gaps exist that a given study attempts to address.
- This, however, can only be done after a literature review.

Basic Approaches to Writing the Research Background...

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- ❑ There are four common approaches to writing the statement of the background, namely:
 1. The 4-perspective model – where the background is written taking into account the historical, theoretical, conceptual and contextual perspectives of the research problem.
 2. The funnel-shaped model - where the research background is written starting by describing the broader to the narrower perspectives of the problem or from the global, continental, regional to the local context.
 3. The known-to-unknown model - where the statement of the background is written beginning by stating the known information about the problem and proceeding to point out what is unknown about the problem.
 4. The integrated model - where the statement of the background is written while taking care of what are considered in the other three models.
- ❑ **The debate is: Which approach/model is most appropriate?**

Research Objectives..

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- Generally, research objectives describe what a researcher expects to achieve in the research project.
- They are the accomplishments the researcher hopes to achieve by conducting the study.
- Research objectives may be general or specific.
- A general research objective is a much broader statement about what the **study aims** to achieve overall.
- It is, in fact, the broad goal of the study - commonly stated in unmeasurable terms.
- The general objective is variously referred to as the goal, aim or purpose of the study.

How to State the General Objective (or purpose)...

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- A good purpose statement should point out 'what' the researcher intends to achieve and 'why' he/she wants it done.
- The statement of purpose (or general objective) must contain action verbs e.g. to determine, establish, describe, compare, etc. to describe what the researcher intends to undertake.
- Second, it must specify what the researcher intends to investigate such as: relationships/differences, role, contribution, effect, impact, influence, effectiveness, efficiency, challenges, prospects, etc.
- Third, it needs to be contextulised.
- Fourth, the general objective is often uni-focused but can also be multi-barreled.

Specific Objectives...

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- Specific research objectives are the precise accomplishments that the researcher hopes to achieve by carrying out the study.
- They are the detailed objectives that describe what will be researched during the study.
- In short, specific objectives identify in greater details the specific aims (or goals/purposes) of a research project.
- They are derived from the general objective or purpose of the study.
- Good specific objectives must be S.M.A.R.T!
- Research objectives need to be derived using an appropriate model/approach.

Basic Models/Approaches for Deriving Specific Research Objectives...

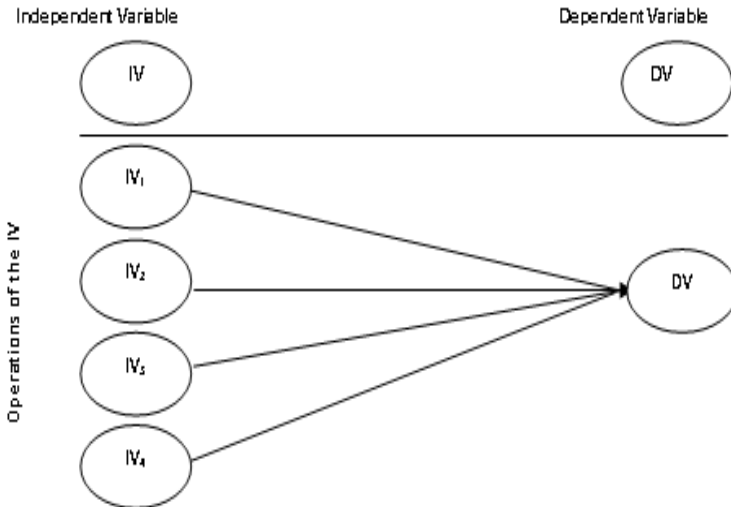


Figure 1: Model 1 objectives

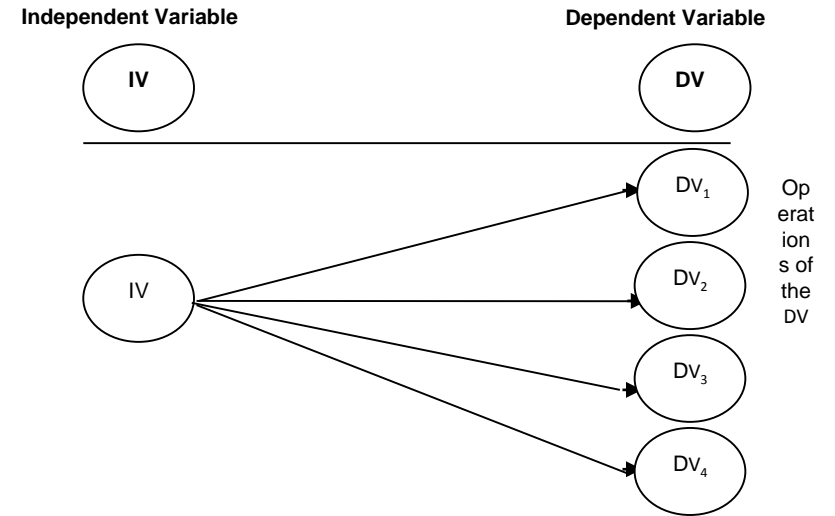


Figure 2: Model 2 objectives

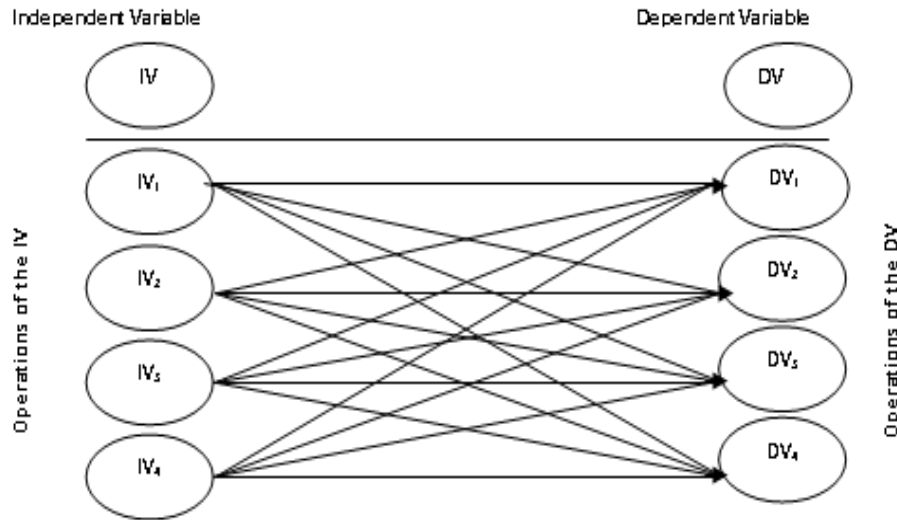


Figure 3: Model 3 objectives

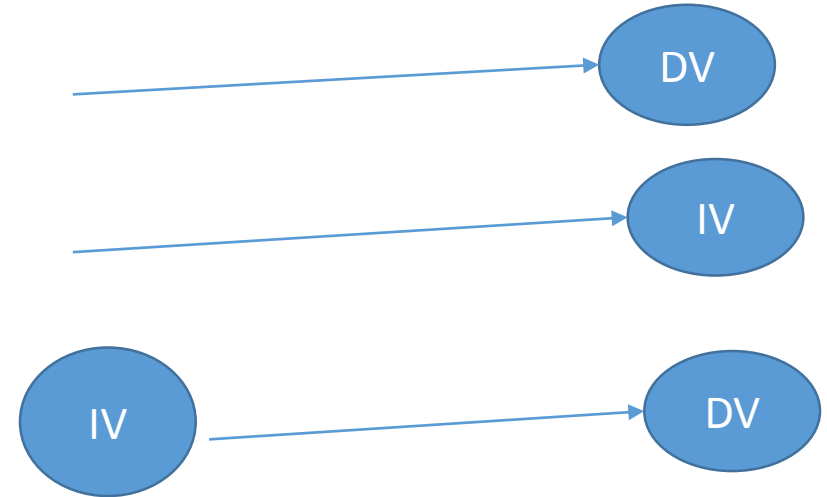


Figure 4: Model 4 objectives

Models/approaches... contd

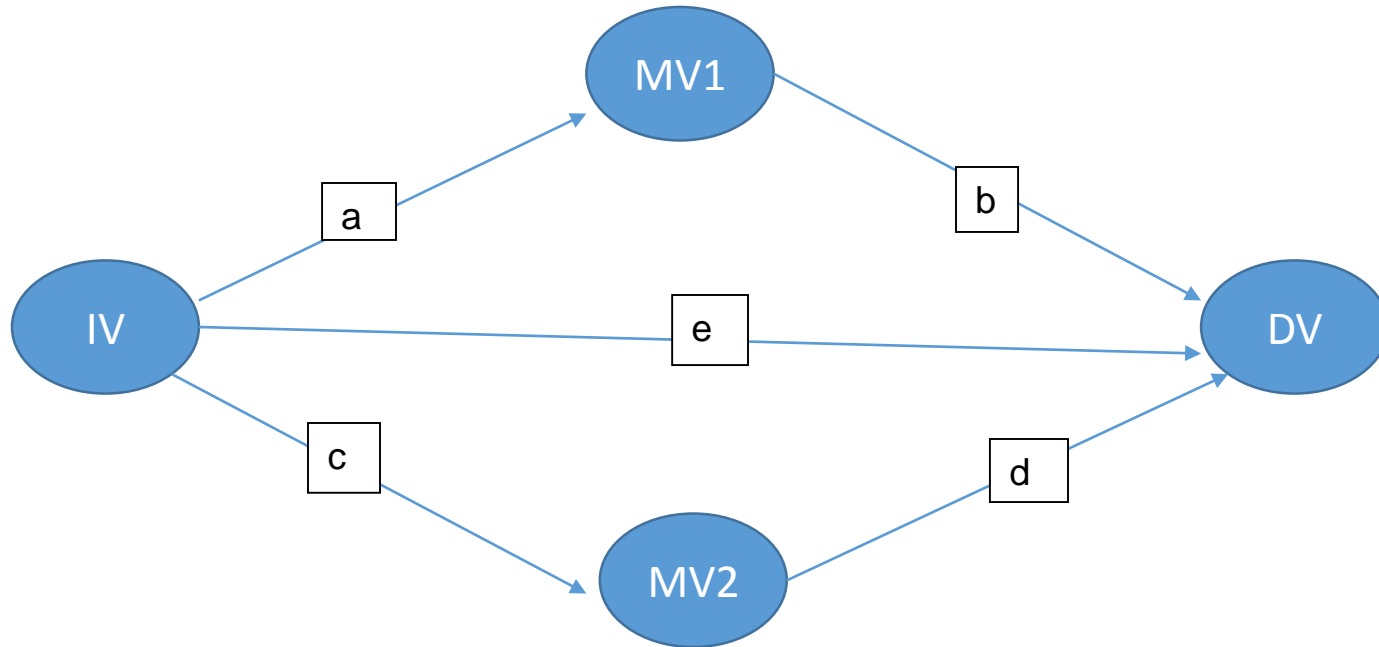


Figure 5: Model 5 objectives

What are Research Questions?

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- A research question is 'a question that a research project sets out to answer'.
- There are **Main** and **Sub** research questions.
- The main research question is that question around which the entire research project is centred.
- That question determines the aim/goal/purpose of a given study.
- Sub-questions meanwhile are the questions derived from the main question that guides the researcher in answering that main question.
- Sub-questions assist/guide the researcher in achieving his/her specific research objectives.
- Good research questions should be: (1) Focused (2) Researchable (3) Feasible (4) Specific (5) Complex and (6) Relevant to your field.

Usage of Research Questions..

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- Research questions can be used together with research objectives in same numbers or not depending on how the objectives are formulated.
- To derive research questions, a researcher can simply restate each objective in question form.
- Research questions are often alternately used with research hypotheses.
- Generally, a researcher uses questions when he/she is not sure of the possible solutions to the research problem.
- Besides, questions are appropriate in guiding the collection and analysis of qualitative data while hypotheses are appropriate for quantitative data.

Research Hypotheses...

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- A hypothesis is a tentative answer to a research problem that is advanced so that it can be tested.
- It is therefore a statement created by a researcher when he/she speculates upon the outcome of a given research or experiment.
- Hypotheses may be stated in null form (H_0) i.e. a hypothesis about no relationship/effect etc. between the variables being studied or
- Alternate form (or research hypothesis) i.e. a hypothesis that states that there is relationship/effect etc. between the variables under investigation.
- ❖ A good research hypothesis should be: (1) testable, (2) clear and precise, (4) based on theory and (4) indicating all the appropriate study variables.
- ❖ Research hypotheses are derived from the study objectives and questions; thus, they should, most often, be alternately used with the research questions unless the nature of research objectives or research approach allows for the concurrent use of both hypotheses and questions.

Reasons for Preferring the Use of Hypotheses over Questions in Positivist Research...

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- The use research hypotheses helps to provide:
 1. a specific focus or direction for the investigation;
 2. for the testing of the relationships/differences between variables;
 3. the investigator with the opportunity to confirm (or not) his/her earlier assumptions;
 4. a framework for reporting the results and drawing conclusions from the study.

Scope of a Study...

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- ❖ This is also referred to as the delimitations of the study.
- ❖ It is a description of the boundary of the research in terms of:
 - ✓ Content,
 - ✓ Sample size,
 - ✓ Geographical coverage,
 - ✓ Theoretical coverage, and
 - ✓ Time dimension... in a single or a few paragraphs.

Significance of a Study...

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- ❖ This refers to the relevance of the study in terms of its academic contributions to and practical use that might be made of the findings.
- ❖ It is always stated as a suggestion or intended expectation from the study.
- ❖ Significance is best considered in terms of usage, benefits or advantages that might be derived from the findings, recommendations and conclusions of the study.
- ❖ The researcher should identify the potential parties and how they may benefit from the study.

Justification of the Study...

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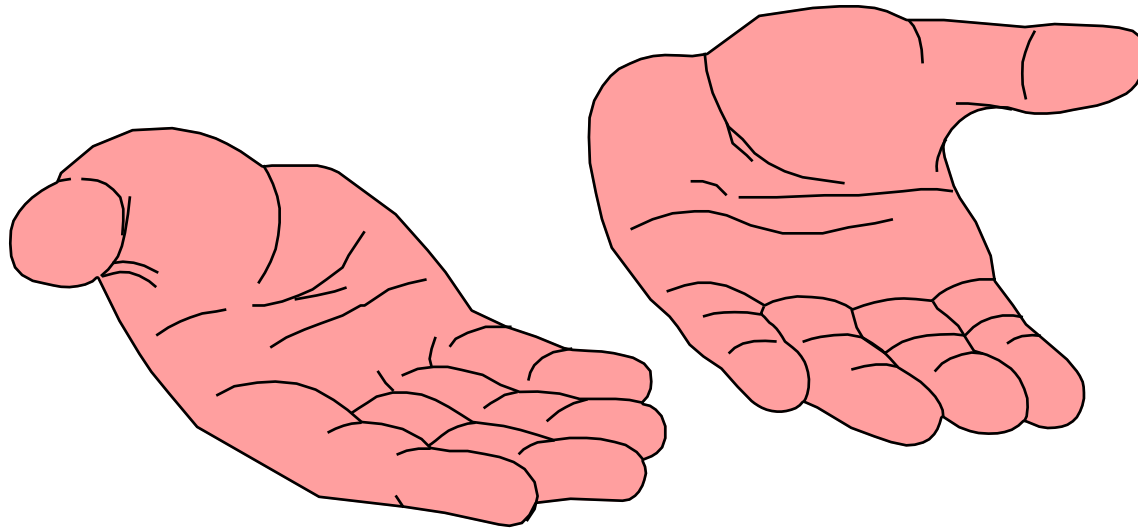
- In the justification, the researcher provides the rationale of the study.
- Arguments such as these ones below could suffice:
 - The issues under investigation are topical of critical today.
 - Limited research work has been done in this area.
 - The findings will be of great use to a wide range of stakeholders.

Conclusion...

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- Our discussion in two days has covered chapter one issues in a standard thesis/dissertation proposal or report which often look as follows:
 - Introduction
 - Background
 - Statement of the Problem
 - Purpose of the study
 - Study Objectives
 - Research Questions/ or Hypotheses
 - Scope of the Study
 - Significance of the Study
 - Justification of the study

Thank you for your attention!



Any questions or comments ?