Assignment 1: The Research Question

Objectives: After completing this assignment, you will be able to

• Find a research report using the UF library system
• Identify and interpret the objectives and research question in research reports
• Identify and interpret the author’s theoretical or research hypothesis
• Analyze how the variables in the specific study relate to the constructs and linkages in the theoretical framework
• Evaluate the degree to which the research contributes to theoretical understanding and to solving problems, issues or needs

Select any one of the articles listed below for this assignment. There is NO direct link at Canvas or the course website to the reports. You have to look them up using the UF library system. You do NOT have to pay to get the article if you get it through the UF library system. If you fail to use the library system, you will have to pay for the article.


Dey, S., Resurreccion, B.P. & Doneys, P. (2014) Gender and environmental struggles: Voices from Adivasi Garo community in Bangladesh. Gender, Place & Culture 21(8), 945-962. DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2013.832662


Submit the completed flow chart (see below) on Canvas under Assignment 1: The Research Question. *Use this title for the submission “Your Last Name_First Author Last Name_A1”* Example: Swisher_Kogan_A1

Complete the template called “Flow Chart Template for ARTICLES YOU READ.” There is a link to this document at the course home page. Do NOT try to use the one called “Flow Chart for YOUR DESIGNS.” Provide some detail. I need to be able to assess how well you understand the information in this article. I cannot do that if you do not provide some detail. Answer all

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questions *in your own words*. You will receive **zero points for simply repeating what the authors say** – copy and paste is NOT an option. The questions below have a **bold heading** – it indicates the column in the Flow Chart where your answer(s) go.

*Do no try to write paragraphs. I want clear, precise statements written in your own words and terms. Quality – not quantity of words counts.*

1. **Box 1: Author’s Objectives.** Review the document “The Body of Knowledge” before you try to answer this question. Most research, including theory-based research, is motivated by the desire to solve a “real world” problem or provide knowledge needed by practitioners. Most researchers describe the contributions to the body of knowledge that they want to make with a specific study in the introduction, often using a phrase like “The objectives of this research are...” Do **not** copy and paste. Explain what the author hopes to contribute in your *own words*. Do not “invent” contributions that the author never mentions, but read carefully and try to understand what the author wants to achieve.

   A. **Box 1-A – Topic.** Almost all research provides empirical evidence about the topic. If an article does not present empirical evidence, it is not a research report. What contributions (new information, new setting, new population, new factors) to the empirical evidence about the topic does the author hope to make?

   B. **Box 1-B – Understand & Explain.** Most research addresses understanding and solving a problem. What does the author want to add to how we understand and can address the PIN of interest?

   C. **Box 1C – Contribute to Theory.** What contributions to theory does s/he want to make? Be prudent in this response. Good research questions are theory-based, but **not all researchers want to build or develop theory**. E.g., it is possible to *use theory* without trying to *develop theory*. Do not confuse the two. A researcher who wants to develop theory will have explicit objectives about building theory. Examples are to add to theory, to test theory under new conditions, to test a new theory to explain something that existing theories do not explain well, or to compare which of two or more theories provides the best explanation for something. If you think the author used theory but did not build theory, say so. Failure to develop theory is **not** an indication of a weak or poor contribution to the body of knowledge. Failure to *use theory* is often a weakness.

2. **Box 2: Research Questions.** While most researchers do want to add to empirical evidence about a topic, the research reported in high impact research journals typically must do more than add to evidence about a topic. Research that does not aim to explain or build theory is *descriptive rather than explanatory*. Scientific research focuses on addressing problems, issues or needs by adding to knowledge. Therefore, good scientific research questions ask what we need to *know or understand* to be able to address a problem, issue or need. Research based on such questions is *explanatory as well as descriptive*. These research questions are usually theory-based, even if the author does not want to build or test theory. State the research question(s) *in your own words*. Do NOT copy and paste. For example, the research question might be “How does self-efficacy affect graduate student performance in research?” This is a very simple example of a research question. You will probably see a more complex question that explores several relationships. State **all of the research questions**. I suggest you number them. It makes it easier to complete the assignment.
3. **Box 3: Theoretical Constructs & Linkages Explored in the Research**

   A. **Box 3-A -- Constructs.** What constructs does the author want to explore? In the research question I stated above, self-efficacy is a construct in the theory of planned behavior. The topic of the research is “graduate student performance.” Do not confuse the topic with the theoretical construct. For example, the theory of planned behavior states that subjective norms strongly influence normative beliefs, which in turn affect our decisions to engage in specific behaviors. A specific research article may examine how peer influences affect young people’s decision to smoke. This is the topic of the research. The theoretical constructs examined are subjective norms, normative beliefs, and behavior.

   B. **Box 3-B -- General Hypotheses.** Hypotheses are statements about relationships. General or working hypotheses are typically based on relationships among constructs as they are expressed with regard to a specific topic. Some people, particularly people who use qualitative analysis, refer to these as “propositions.” For example, in the theory of planned behavior, subjective norms affect normative beliefs, which in turn affect behavioral decisions. A study could examine these “theoretical” relationships. Most researchers have a “research” or “general” or “working” hypothesis — a general idea about what they expect to observe based on the theoretical framework that they are using, although they may not use the term “hypothesis” when they discuss these expectations. General hypotheses deal with the anticipated relationships between constructs in a theory applied to a specific topic. Some authors explicitly state the research or working hypothesis: “We expected that peer influences [a construct] would strongly influence the decision to smoke [a topic].” Others state it vaguely: “The proposed relationships between peer influence and smoking behavior ...” Others do not state it at all. You have to figure it out for yourself. State the general, working or research hypotheses (these are the same thing) in your own words. This is not a statistical hypothesis and should not be confused with a statistical hypothesis. A statistical hypothesis states the anticipated effect between two or more variables in a study — not constructs.

   C. **Box 3-C – Interventions or Treatments.** Was there some direct intervention — some manipulation designed to foster or cause changes in the participants, to make them different than they were before participating in the study. These might be changes in knowledge, behavior, attitudes, health status, or identity, for example.

4. **Box 4: Sampling -- NOT NEEDED IN ASSIGNMENT 2. LEAVE THIS BLANK.**

5. **Box 5: Data Collection Procedures – NOT NEEDED IN ASSIGNMENT 2. LEAVE THIS BLANK.**

6. **Box 6: Variables and Level of Measurement.** These responses deal with the variables you listed in Box 3-B. A specific study is, in essence, the application of a theory (or more than one theory) to a specific topic and a specific context (place, sample of people, time). A study deals with specific variables. The variables represent or “stand for” the constructs in the theory. For example, in my example, the authors examine three constructs — subjective norms, normative beliefs, and behavior. They might use items like the number of friends who smoke and whether peers see smoking as a sign of maturity to create a variable called “peer approval of smoking” to represent the construct subjective norms. They might use
items like frequency and length of time since an individual started smoking to create a variable called “smoking behavior.” These are not items – specific questions – they are the variables that represent the construct – most variables in social research incorporate several specific items or questions. In this example, for example, frequency of smoking and length of time as a smoker are two items which, along with some other specific items, would constitute the measure for “smoking behavior.” Simply list the variables that represent each construct: Construct behavior. Variable smoking behavior. Construct subjective norms. Variable peer approval of smoking.

A. **Box 6-A – Grouping Variables.** Grouping variables are used to separate participants into comparison groups – male versus female, large versus small landowner, or people assigned to treatment group versus people assigned to non-treatment (control) group. If your study has only one group (one sample), there probably are no grouping variables.

B. **Box 6-B – Independent Variables.** Independent variables are typically either descriptive (like sex, age, size of farm) or variables that represent a theoretical construct (attitudes as a predictor of behavior, farm income as a predictor of conservation practices).

C. **Box 6-C – Dependent or Outcome Variables.** The dependent or outcome variable is usually, but not always, based on the theory. For example, in the theory of planned behavior, attitude is a predictor of intent to change behavior, which in turn is a predictor of behavior change – which is the final outcome or dependent variable.

7. **Box 7: Statistical Data Analysis – Complete only if statistical data analyses are used. NOT NEEDED IN ASSIGNMENT 2. LEAVE THIS BLANK.**

A. **Box 7-A – Statistical Hypotheses.** Formal or statistical hypotheses are statements of the relationships between variables that the researcher expects to observe. This refers specifically to statistically tested hypotheses, not the author’s general “propositions” or “anticipated relationships” that you listed in Box 3-C. For example, in the smoking study, a formal hypothesis might be: “Peer approval of smoking will be positively associated with smoking behavior.” State the authors’ statistical hypotheses in your own words. Do not copy and paste.

B. **Box 7-B – Tests Used.** For each hypothesis listed in Box 7-A, indicate the specific statistical procedure used to test the hypothesis. Use the book “There’s a Stat for That” and my “Guide to Statistics” and “The Logic of Data Analysis Using Statistical Techniques” to figure out which tests were used. The authors will typically state the name of the test, but you need to understand what the test does to complete Box 7-C below.

C. **Box 7-C – Results.** State the specific results of the study in your own words. State the results for each hypothesis. For example, you might say that “There was a positive relationship between Peer Approval of Smoking and Smoking Behavior. This means that more peer approval was associated with more smoking. This result was significant at a p-value of 0.03.

8. **Box 8: Qualitative Data Analysis. Complete only if qualitative data analyses are used. NOT NEEDED IN ASSIGNMENT 2. LEAVE THIS BLANK.**
A. **Box 8-A – Data/Information Storing and Preparation.** Explain in your own words how the authors stored or archived the information. This may include tape or video recordings, transcription of interviews, writing up case files, or even some preliminary “purely topical” coding.

B. **Box 8-B – Individual & Multi-Case Analysis & Results.** This includes things like analytic coding, identifying themes, or creating categories of responses. Often at this step the authors refer to both theoretical themes or topics or categories that emerge – related to their general or working hypotheses or propositions and “emergent” themes or ideas. The latter refer to ideas that respondents expressed that really were not anticipated, not part of the theoretical framework. Almost all qualitative analyses do conduct this kind of analysis and the themes or ideas that they find are often the results of the study, especially when further higher level analyses are not used.

C. **Box 8-C – Higher Level Analysis & Results.** Not all analyses reach these higher levels. Higher level analyses can mean finding relationships between categories or themes, creating typologies based on the information, or creating qualitative models that often are very similar to regression models in structure. Many reports fail to report higher-level analyses and some researchers do not conduct such analyses. When they do, these are typically the important results of the student.

D. **Box 8-D – Any Other Procedures.** Sometimes there are other procedures, such as presenting tables showing frequency of categories of responses or themes or procedures used to ensure rigor in the analysis (member checking or respondent review of results). Describe these here.

9. **Box 9: Results.** Explain the overall results obtained in the study. Results are specific to the study. They are usually listed after the individual results obtained in analysis are described. They are the typically the results that are most meaningful in terms of the objectives of the study.

10. **Box 10: Conclusions and/or Recommendations.** Do not confuse the results with the conclusions. Results are specific to a study. They may be things like the outcomes of statistical tests. Conclusions on the other hand are broader. They may be recommendations for practice, contributions to theory, or a new and novel insight about something. We do not generalize results in most research – we generalize conclusions. These conclusions are what Gorard calls claims. Refer to Box 1 where you listed the author’s objectives. The conclusions or recommendations are essentially where the author tells you how well they achieved those objectives.

A. **Box 9-A – Topical.** What did the author add to what we know about the topic? What did s/he find that was new and different? What did they reconfirm that others had reported before? What did they leave unanswered with regard to their objectives (Box 1-A)?

B. **Box 9-B – Explain & Understand.** What did the author add to how we understand and can explain the problem s/he wanted to address? What did s/he find that was new and different? What did they reconfirm that others had reported before? What did they leave unanswered with regard to their objectives (Box 1-B)?
C. Box 9-C – Develop Theory. IF the authors intended to contribute to the development of theory, what did they add? Did they reject the theory? Did they compare two theories and find that one is a better explanation than the other? Did they propose new constructs or ideas to include in a theory? Did they propose a new theory?

10. NO Box – your assessment of the contributions made by the research. There is no box for this on the form. Just add this after the table – it does not have to be in a box. Go back to the objectives (Box 1) and the conclusions (Box 9). For each objective you listed, indicate whether you think the authors were able to make a meaningful contribution or not. This is your assessment of the value of the research, not what the authors say (what they say goes in Box 9). Remember for a researcher, it is as or even more important to disprove than confirm what you expected to find. Not “finding what you thought you would” IS a contribution to the body of knowledge. The question here is “Did they succeed in making meaningful contributions to the body of knowledge – whether or not it all turned out “like they thought it should”? Justify your assessment. If you think not – what were the weaknesses? If you think they made good contributions, what was it that impressed you?

11. NO Box – your assessment of the research question. Based on all of your answers above, was their research question “a good one” from the point of view of thick versus thin questions, contributions to the body of knowledge, and laying groundwork for future research and practice? Explain your logic and reasoning, drawing on the material we have covered about research questions.

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<th>Assessment Criteria</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
<th>Your Points</th>
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<td>Followed instructions</td>
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<td>Was able to answer questions in your own words</td>
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<td>Was able to explain the researcher’s objectives and questions and did not misstate or misinterpret the researcher’s intent and questions; did not substitute some other question or objective for that of the researcher</td>
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<td>Differentiated between the theoretical components in the research question and the topic of the study</td>
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<td>Differentiated between the theoretical basis for the research (constructs, theoretical framework, general or research hypotheses) and the topic of the study</td>
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<td>Demonstrated understanding of the relationship between the theoretical or research hypotheses and the statistical hypotheses if used</td>
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<td>Could explain the steps in qualitative data analysis if used</td>
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<td>Correctly distinguished between results and conclusions and was able to tie the conclusions to the researcher’s intended contributions to the body of knowledge</td>
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<td>Applied the concepts discussed in class and covered in the required readings in answering the last questions in particular</td>
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<td>Demonstrated that you understand the material that we have covered by using examples and explaining how you reached conclusions especially in your responses to the last two questions</td>
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