TITLE IN ALL CAPS

A Thesis

by

STUDENT NAME IN ALL CAPS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies  
of Prairie View A&M University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Month/Year of Graduation

Major Subject:

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Approved as to style and content by:

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 Head of Department Dean of College

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 Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

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Student Name

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# ABSTRACT

Title (sentence case)  
(Month/Year of Graduation)

Student Name and Undergraduate Degree and Institution

Graduate Degree and Institution

Chair of Dissertation Committee: Chairperson’s Name

Text begins here. According to APA 7th edition, Abstracts follow one of two formats. The paragraph format is in single paragraph form. A structured Abstract is where labels are inserted to identify various sections, that is, Objectives, Methods, Results, Conclusions. The length is 250-350 words.

The Abstract should reflect the entire document and summarize the research and findings in your study. Ideally, the Abstract will be relatively brief and information dense but should cover the following: (1) problem and purpose of the study, (2) current approaches to problem and gaps in the literature, (3) research questions, (4) methodology used including population, (5) main findings, and (6) main conclusions. The text is double-spaced. There must be no additional space before or after titles and headings**.**

***Keywords***: <indented, in italics, words in lowercase except proper nouns; no punctuation>

# DEDICATION

Text begins here. The Dedication page is optional, follows the Abstract page, and should be one page in length. The title DEDICATION is capitalized and centered at the top of the page. Use the same margins, font style, and size as used in the rest of the document.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Text begins here (ideally one page). The Acknowledgements page is optional, follows the Dedication page, should be one page in length. The title ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS is capitalized and centered at the top of the page. Use the same margins, font style, and size as used in the rest of the document.

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**CHAPTER I**

# INTRODUCTION

## Overview/Background

This section should be unique to the College of Arts and Sciences. As such, the headings used in this template may not reflect those. The heading you use should be at the direction of your chairperson. Those included here are for informational purposes only.

In general, this section should clearly explicate the gap in the literature and state how and why your study (your proposed solution) *may* further existing research. The gap is the need or opportunity that has been identified by other scholars and researchers in the literature. The gap is not your opinion even though your knowledge and experiences may serve as antidotal evidence. You cannot automatically presume what you determine is a problem has also been identified by others in the discipline in a like manner. As such, the problem should be supported with citations. Do not forget to allow space for the style statement below.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

This Thesis follows the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th Edition.*

All **facts** and **statistics** should be attributed to the appropriate source and represent the most current data possible. For example, if you are citing government data, the data is typically published annually. Citing the most recent data is important because it can change from year to year.

The majority of citations should be from within the last five to seven years. If you do use older references, make sure to pair them with more recent sources. Make sure you do not write in present tense supported by citations that are out of date (for instance citations 10, 15 or 20 years old). Just as important, the majority of your citations should be from primary sources. A primary source represents original content (American Psychological Association, 2020). Citing secondary sources should be avoided except for instances such as “the original work is out of print, unavailable, or available only in a language that you do not understand” (American Psychological Association, 2020, p. 258). APA presents guidelines for citing secondary sources (see p. 258) but the manual cautions the practice should be used sparingly.

Define jargon specific to your discipline when you use it and then include the word or term under the Definition of Terms. Words and terms are spelled out and defined according to how other scholars and researchers in your discipline use them, not how they are defined in a dictionary and certainly not Wikipedia. Thereafter, the acronym can be used.

A note about capitalization. One of the earliest grammar lessons taught is that proper nouns are capitalized. According to APA (2020), racial and ethnic terms are considered proper nouns. Given that, capitalize **all** racial terms: African American, White, Latino, Mexican, American Indian.

The length for the Overview/Background is anywhere from 1 ½ pages to four pages. Since this section previews your Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, and the Importance/Significance of the Study, you will want to use those sections to expound on your major points. Make sure each paragraph contains at least three sentences (topic sentence, supporting details, and conclusion) and make sure each paragraph properly transitions to the next. Also remember that there is only one space after every period.

## Statement of the Problem

Use declarative statements to explain the problem and how and why it has developed over time. It should include the significance, magnitude, and importance of the problem to your area of emphasis. Previous studies in this area that indicate the gap, identify the gap, and justify your study should be referenced.

The gap in the literature can be theoretical, methodological, call for a new line of inquiry, extend an existing line of inquiry or how it has been investigated through a new framework. It will be difficult to identify the gap if you do not know the empirical research related to your topic. Literature includes dissertations. Nevertheless, cursory research or assuming there is no research increases the probability that you will make statements of fact that are in fact, **untrue**. The length for this section can be anywhere from three paragraphs to three to four pages.

## Purpose of the Study

This paragraph(s) discusses the purpose of your study and who the purpose will benefit (i.e. practitioners, policymakers, administrators, educator preparation programs, etc.). Sample language for a quantitative study might be, “The purpose/intent/objective of this quantitative (casual comparative/correlational) design is to (investigate/determine/discover) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 124). If you have more than one purpose, be sure to explain each. This section can be as short as one paragraph or as long as one to two pages.

Figure 1

*Example Formatting*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Column 1 | Column 2 | Column 3 |
| According to APA, it is permissible to use smaller font in Tables and Figures. The font can be as small as nine pitch. | Using a smaller font will make it easier to size the Tables and Figures so that they fit on one page. |  |

## Importance of the Study/Significance of the Study

At the dissertation proposal stage, in some colleges this section is *Importance of the Study*. The sub-heading becomes *Significance of the Study* at the final dissertation stage. Again, follow the direction of your chairperson. In some instances, it may be the preference of the chair to couple this section with the Purpose section. Whether this is a stand-alone sub-heading or whether it is coupled with Purpose of the Study, you should identify and describe why your study is important to the field of educational leadership (or the specific domain of your doctorate) and state the practical implications of the potential results. Significance/Importance also discusses how the research may extend or contribute to existing models or theories. The importance of your study is not opinion! **All** statements of fact must be supported by citations.

Above all else, make sure you qualify your statements with words like *may*, or *can*. Rarely are absolutes in research. At best, extrapolations and inferences can be made but keep in mind, there are always exceptions. Further, at the proposal stage, you do not want to prejudge your data. As a researcher, you must be willing to follow the data – not lead the data.

## Theoretical Framework Overview

The framework (theoretical = theory or conceptual = model) is the lens through which your study is viewed. It not only guides the research but acts in similar fashion as a mirror that magnifies the phenomenon to see whether there are discrepancies in the research and if there are discrepancies, can they be explained by the framework (Imenda, 2014). Most importantly, the framework lays the foundation for your research questions.

It is vital that you know the difference between a theoretical framework and a conceptual framework. Ngulube et al. (2015) explained that theoretical frameworks stem from established theories in the literature whereas conceptual frameworks are diagrammatic representations of concepts (i.e. ideas) or constructs (variables) that show their relationship to the problem/phenomenon under study. The conceptual framework visual illustrates linkage of the abstracts to empirical data. Theories explain and predict while conceptual frameworks provide visual understanding (Ngulube et al., 2015).

Before you select your framework, make sure you discuss with your chair and methodologist to ensure what you are using provides the best lens for your research. Explain why the framework is best for your topic and why it is central to understanding the phenomenon. If it is an existing theory, explain the background/history and its development over time. If there are certain scholars associated with the theory or model, include them. The minimum length should be at least two pages.

Figure 2

*Second Example*

## Research Questions

In quantitative studies, research questions should reflect your framework and your variables. Include hypotheses.

## Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations are typically placed in Chapter I, sometimes Chapter III, or in Chapter V. As with other elements, the placement is often the preference of the chairperson. Limitations are considered factors or weaknesses that can impact a study that are beyond the control of the researcher (Simon & Goes, 2013; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Limitations can be related to the research design process as in your goal was to select two high schools but only one was available due to some unforeseen circumstance, or 15 persons submitted informed consent but three of them elected to withdraw from study for personal reasons. The important point here is that limitations that materially affected the research process or outcomes should be documented.

On the other hand, delimitations are those factors that can impact a study that are within the control of the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Delimitations “are mainly concerned with the study’s theoretical background, objectives, research questions, variable under study and study sample” (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018, p. 157). An explanation of each must be provided.

As stated above, the location of this section is usually determined by the preference of your Chair or Methodologist. It is not uncommon for it to be located in Chapter V. In some instances, it is included in Chapter III. Check with your chair to determine where it should be located in your study.

## Definition of Terms

Terms that appear here should be in alphabetical order and unique to the discipline. They are not every day common words with common meanings. Moreover, they should be defined according to the literature, that is, how they are used by other researchers and scholars, not the dictionary. Methodological terms are rarely included here. They are defined as used in Chapter III.

***Word***: definition with citation at the end.

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***Word***: definition with citation at the end.

***Word***: definition with citation at the end.

## Organization of the Study (optional)

Explain how the study is organized in this section. Stay consistent with roman numerals for chapter headings (that is, do not use Chapter One since PV’s chapters are written as Chapter I, Chapter II, Chapter III, etc.). Remember to have at least three sentences per paragraph.

## Summary

Summarize the chapter and provide the reader with a preview of the upcoming chapters. This should be at minimum three to five sentences. The typical length of Chapter I is 12-18 pages.

**CHAPTER II**

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The Introductory paragraph to the literature review restates the purpose of your study. Next, it explains what you are reviewing and its significance to your topic. The literature review should cover some or all of the following (check with your Chair/Methodologist first): (1) overview or historical background of your problem, (2) analysis and synthesis of the literature related to your problem and purpose; this means reporting the results of studies closely related to your topic, with a focus on strengths and weaknesses (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009), (3) analysis and synthesis of the literature related to the justification of your study. What the literature review is not is a book report or a summary of the literature. It is designed to showcase work by others you deem important to providing context, understanding of the problem, and justification for your research.

Before you begin your literature review, it is recommended you develop your list of sub-headings, and get them approved before writing. This can eliminate the number of rewrites or shifts in focus or emphasis suggested by your committee members. For suggestions, look at other dissertations on your topic to see what areas they covered. Getting approval up front will ensure you are moving in the right direction. Note that you should be reviewing the most recent literature available and that should include other dissertations. However, there are some topics in education that have been extensively covered. In those instances, you need to make sure you have a good grasp of what others have produced and that may mean going back several decades. You can group the literature according to theoretical perspectives, time periods, reform efforts, important topics, or methodology (quantitative or qualitative). Your literature review should be between 25 and 50 pages.

One method of approaching the literature review is to pull relevant literature for each sub-section and discuss it in chronological order. In this way, it is easier to demonstrate either long-standing trends or theoretical perspectives, note outliers, discuss the specific contributions of a scholar or scholarship, and illuminate strengths and weaknesses. Such continuity can aid in fashioning a coherent chapter.

Rigor is evidenced by **analysis** – not reporting. This, more than any other chapter, is where the perspectives and findings of others are showcased. Analysis includes who conducted studies, what methodological design did they use, what was their central research question, what was their population, and what did they conclude from their findings? What are the strengths of their research? What are the weaknesses? What new theorems or lines of inquiry have been developed? What provocative points of view exist? How does the literature relate to your study?

A word about tense – according APA 7th edition, you should use past tense when you are expressing or referring to something or a condition that occurred at “a specific, definite time in the past, such as when discussing another researcher’s work” (p. 118). This means, as you discuss literature that has already been written, you should use past tense (e.g. Smith and Jones (2019) **stated** or **said** or **found** or **contended** or **argued**). If you do use present perfect tense, then you must be consistent throughout your document. Recommended verb tenses by APA 7th edition can be found on page 118. A dissertation is more apt to use level three and four sub-headings in this chapter. APA 7th edition sub-headings can be found on page 48. For ease of formatting, they are below:

## Topic One

***Sub-topic*** (this is level three sub-heading – flush left, bold, italics)

## Topic Two

***Sub-topic*** (this is level three sub-heading)

**Sub-topic of Sub-topic**. (this is level four, indented, bold, with a period).

## Summary

A summary of this chapter and a preview of the rest of the study is written here. A note of caution regarding single-source citations. Single-source citations in and of themselves are not bad. However, single-source citations can infer that the student does not have a good grasp of the literature, the research skills are poor, or the student is lazy. Of course, it is possible for none of those assumptions to be true, but the inference is that they are. Single-source citations cannot be avoided when discussing the particular work of scholars or researchers. However, it should be good research practice to have multiple sources for statements of fact.

**CHAPTER III**

# METHODOLOGY

The Introductory paragraph in general should address what you will cover in this chapter. You should have at least five sentences. This template follows a qualitative research design. There is a separate chapter for quantitative research designs.

## Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

Restate the research questions.

## Research Design and Rationale

Identify the research design and its connection to the research questions. Concisely state the study’s variables (independent, dependent, covariate, mediating, moderating), as appropriate. Explain any time and resources constraints consistent with the design choice. Describe how the design choice is consistent with the research designs needed to advance knowledge in the discipline. Familiarize yourself with the epistemology, ontology, and axiology perspectives of qualitative and quantitative research. This will give your chapter more depth. Make sure you have at least three to four citations in addition to Creswell, to justify your research design.

## Type of Quantitative Inquiry

Explain the type of quantitative inquiry. For example, if you are conducting an explanatory correlational design, define it, cite it, and restate the variables.

## Population and Sampling

This needs to be described in sufficient detail so that other researchers may replicate the study. For any study, it is highly recommended that you purchase a book on the specific research design/type in order to easily discuss the features of your research methodology. You want to demonstrate a thorough understanding. In defining the target population, state the size, if known, or approximate/estimated size.

Next, describe your sampling procedures and strategy. Explain specific procedures for how the sample will be drawn. Describe the sampling frame (inclusion and exclusion criteria. If appropriate, use a power analysis to determine the size of the sample and include: justification for the effect size, alpha level, and power level chosen. Cite the source for calculating or the tool used to calculate the sample size.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Sample Table |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

## Data Sources/Collection

Detail the data source(s) and how you intend to collect the data. If you are using archival data, explain the procedures for gaining access to the data set(s). Describe the necessary permission to gain access. If historical documents or legal documents are used as sources of data, demonstrate the reputability of the sources and justify why they represent the best sources of data. Be sure to state where and how data will be stored in accordance with PVAMU’s data retention policy.

## Instruments and Measurements

For published instruments, discuss the name of the developer of the instrument and year of publication. Describe the appropriateness of the instrument for your study. State that permission to use the instrument was obtained from the developer (or relevant party/entity). Discuss the published reliability and validity values relevant to their use in the study. This includes how variables/scale score is calculated. Discuss where or with what population the instrument was previously used and how validity and reliability were established.

## Data Analysis Steps

Identify software used for analysis. Provide explanation of data cleaning and screening procedures as appropriate for the study. Describe in detail the analysis plan including the statistical tests that will be or were used to test the hypotheses, procedures used to account for multiple statistical tests, rationale for inclusion of potential covariates or confounding variables, and how results will be/were interpreted (key parameter estimates, confidence intervals or probability values, odds ratios, etc.).

Table 2

*Outline of Data Analysis Steps*

## Validation Measures

Describe threats to external validity, for example, testing reactivity, interaction effects of selection and experimental variables, specificity of variables, reactive effects of experimental arrangements, and multiple treatment interference. Include how they will be or were addressed. Also describe threats to internal validity, for example, the history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, statistical regression, experimental mortality, and selection-maturation interaction. Include how they will be or were addressed. Finally, describe any threats to construct or statistical validity. Be sure to define terms.

## Ethics and Risks

Explain why principles and ethics are important to research. Then discuss how your study will meet or met an acceptable standard of ethics regarding protecting the privacy and confidentiality of your participants -if applicable. Here is where you can address securing institutional permissions, including IRB and other requisite entities, the Informed Consent if applicable, strategies to prevent coercion, and any potential conflicts of interest. If you are using archival data, describe the treatment of the data, that is, whether the data are anonymous or confidential, and any concerns related to each. Also include protections for confidential data like data storage procedures, data dissemination, who will have access to the data, and when the data will be destroyed.

Define risks for the type of study you are conducting. Second, address how risks are inherent in all research endeavors. Next discuss any risks or potential harm participants, if any, will face or faced if your study involved an instrument, and how you mitigated risks. Other ethical issues that may need to be addressed involve explaining procedures followed, if, for instance, you conducted the study in your work environment, or power differentials.

## Chapter Summary

Use at least one paragraph to summarize chapter here.

**CHAPTER IV**

# findings

Restate the purpose of your study. The research questions and hypotheses can also be restated here.

## Data Collection

Describe the time frame for data collection as the actual recruitment and response rates. Present any discrepancies in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter III. Report baseline descriptive and demographic characteristics of the sample. Describe how representative the sample is of the population or how proportional it is to the larger population if non-probability sampling is used (external validity). Provide results of basic univariate analyses that justify inclusion of covariates in the model, if applicable.

## Results

Report descriptive statistics that appropriately characterize the sample. Evaluate statistical assumptions. Report statistical analysis findings, organized by research questions and hypotheses including: the exact statistics and associated probability values, confidence intervals around the statistics, and effect sizes. Report results of post-hoc analyses of statistical tests. Report any additional statistical tests of hypotheses that emerged from the analysis of the main hypotheses. Include Tables and Figures to illustrate the results. Tables and Figures must conform to APA 7th Edition formatting standards.

## Summary

Provide a summary of the chapter.

**CHAPTER V**

# discussion and conclusions

## Overview of Study

Include research questions again. Summarize your study and your findings.

## Discussion

This is where you tie your problem, purpose, significance and findings together. You essentially answer, “What does this mean and how does it extend existing research? What implications does your findings portend for educational leadership? Be as expansive as possible and discuss consistency or non-consistency with current literature.

## Discussion of Theoretical Framework in This Study

This section specifically addresses your findings in relation to your framework. How does your framework relate to your findings? Did your findings support the elements of your framework, in whole or in part? In what areas did your findings not support your framework? Were the findings consistent with other studies that used the framework?

## Implications for Practitioners and Policymakers

This section addresses implications for practitioners. Be as specific as possible and when appropriate, make connections to the existing literature. Implications are not opinions, per se. They are practical applications that are derived from the data in your study. Try to have at least three substantive recommendations. You can break this into separate sub-sections if you have at least one recommendation for each. Remember, all text in a dissertation should be in narrative form. This means the recommendations should not be numbered or bulleted.

## Suggestions for Future Research

This section is for additional research. You may suggest studies with different research designs or approaches, longitudinal studies, different populations related to gender, or race. Meaningful suggestions depend upon your extensive knowledge of the literature and your understanding of your participants’ experiences and viewpoints. You should aim here for substantive research that extends understanding of your research study. Remember, all text in a dissertation should be in narrative form. This means the recommendations should not be numbered or bulleted.

## Concluding Thoughts/Summary

Here is where you put your final point on your study. This section can be as brief as one paragraph or as extensive as two to three pages. Be sure that you tie everything together, not introducing new or unrelated conclusions that do not appear anywhere else in your document.

# References

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# appendices

# curriculum vitae