

Is There a Conceptual Difference between Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks?

Sitwala Imenda

University of Zululand, Faculty of Education, Department of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education, P/Bag x1001, KwaDlangezwa, South Africa

Telephone: +27 35 902 6348/9; Mobile: +27 82 888 3606

E-mail: ImendaS@unizulu.ac.za; imendask@yahoo.com

KEYWORDS Research. Theory. Theoretical Framework. Conceptual Framework

ABSTRACT This is an opinion piece on the subject of whether or not 'theoretical' and 'conceptual' frameworks are conceptual synonyms, or they refer to different constructs. Although, generally, a lot of literature uses these two terms interchangeably – suggesting that they are conceptually equivalent, the researcher argues that these are two different constructs – both by definition and as actualised during the research process. Thus, in this paper, the researcher starts by developing his argument by examining the role of theory in research, and then draws a distinction between areas of research that typically follow deductive versus inductive approaches, with regard to both the review of literature and data collection. The researcher then subsequently argues that whereas a deductive approach to literature review typically makes use of theories and theoretical frameworks, the inductive approach tends to lead to the development of a conceptual framework – which may take the form of a (conceptual) model. Examples depicting this distinction are advanced.