

CHAPTER 7: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis focuses in essence on a new way for the United Nations to maintain international peace and security. This was done through an investigation into associated grounded political theory and an empirical study. The grounded political theory or theoretical research was conducted through a literature study on the concepts of peace and security, and on the mandates of the United Nations and the African Union to maintain international peace and security (Chapters Two and Three). The literature study included researching the background, history and facts on the Darfur conflict and UNAMID (Chapters Four, Five and Six). The empirical study followed the theoretical research and the results are provided in Chapter Eight. Together with the theoretical research, the empirical study aimed to investigate and meet the objectives of the thesis. Different from the theoretical research and as explained in this chapter, the empirical study in this thesis consisted of a qualitative comparative analysis of information gathered through individually focused, semi-structured interviews. These concepts (such as the different types of analyses and interviews) and the methodology of the empirical research are discussed in this chapter. This chapter also contains the research process and the limitations of the study.

It was highlighted in Chapter Six that UNAMID is unique in its hybrid design and operations, and is still in the process of rolling out its mandate and full complement of resources. Thomas (2003:35) suggested that if it can be assumed that every person, group, organisation, or event is unique, then the case study method becomes a suitable vehicle to depict that uniqueness. In the same way, UNAMID was examined as a case study with the aim of understanding and describing in essence its 'uniqueness' and possible unprecedented consequences. The full extent of the aims included an examination of the political motivations/reasons for the United Nations to form a hybrid peace operation with the African Union; the way this could impact on future efforts of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security; and

based on this, to determine whether or not hybrid operations would be a viable alternative for the United Nations to maintain international peace and security. It followed then that the research had to be carefully designed with the above aims in mind. The research design and the manner in which the research was conducted are discussed in the following sections.

7.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

In all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews (Merriam, 2009:87). Pouliot (2010:70) advised that the qualitative interview method assumes that relevant agents are alive and willing to discuss their experience with the researcher. To achieve a greater understanding of the phenomenon, it was therefore necessary to conduct interviews with willing and knowledgeable individuals and stakeholders from relevant institutions, agencies and organisations. To select these individuals and stakeholders, the researcher had to identify a sample group based on some pre-identified criteria (these criteria are discussed in *section 7.3.3.1*). This approach concurred with Kumar (2005:164) who stated that sampling is the process of selecting a few (a sample) from a bigger group (the sampling population) to become the basis for estimating or predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group.

Nothing captures the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods better than the different logics that undergird sampling approaches (Patton, 2002:230). Patton (2002:230) explained that while quantitative inquiry depends on larger examples selected randomly, qualitative inquiry typically focuses in-depth on relatively small samples (even single cases (N=1)), which are selected purposefully. Kumar (2005:179) pointed out that the primary consideration in judgemental or purposeful sampling is the judgement of the researcher as to who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study. As a result, the researcher only goes to those people who, in his/her opinion, are likely to have the required information and be willing to share it (Kumar, 2005:179). Two ‘purposeful sampling’ strategies were relevant to this study and will be elaborated on next.

7.2.1 Purposeful sampling

The first purposeful sampling strategy was “snowball or chain sampling”, which aimed to identify good interview subjects. Using this strategy, one interview subject may direct you to another relevant subject, and so on (Mugo, 2004). According to Babbie (2010:193), in snowball sampling, the researcher has to collect data on a few members of the target population he or she can locate, and then would ask those individuals to provide the information needed to locate other members whom they happen to know. Thus, in this study the researcher started off by selecting and interviewing a few members meeting some baseline criteria (please see *section 7.3.3.1*) and then proceeded to interview other respondents who were identified by the original respondents. Kumar (2005:179) continued that this process has to be followed until the required number of individuals or a saturation point is reached, in terms of the information being sought. A saturation point is reached when one no longer obtains new data or the new data are negligible, according to Kumar (2005:165). Patton (2002:237) observed that snowball or chain sampling was an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases.

This led to the second sampling method which was relevant to this study: ‘critical case sampling’. Critical case sampling permitted logical generalisation and maximum application of information to other cases such as "*If it is true for this one case, it is likely to be true of all other cases*" (Mugo, 2004). Patton (2002:236) agreed that while studying one or a few critical cases does not technically permit broad generalisations to all possible cases, logical generalisations could often be made from the weight of the evidence produced in studying a single, critical case. Therefore, the researcher aimed to find respondents who would be critical to the findings of the study. The research process which consisted of four phases will be discussed in the next section.

7.3 THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process consisted of four chronological phases: 1) considering ethical issues; 2) designing the interview package; 3) conducting the interviews; and 4)

analysing and presenting the information. The next sections elaborate on the four phases, beginning with ethical considerations.

7.3.1 Phase 1: Ethical considerations

The researcher followed three principles of ethical social research (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010:85):

- *Full disclosure*: the researcher revealed his full identity and research purpose to the respondents;
- *Informed consent*: the researcher ensured that the respondents' participation was voluntary and informed, based on the understanding of what the study is about, what its risks and benefits are, how the results will be used, and the fact that participation is voluntary and can be stopped at any time, and that identity will be protected; and
- *Moral integrity*: the researcher ensured that the research process and the research findings were trustworthy and valid.

Accordingly, to meet the above ethical principles the researcher had to consider the organisational requirements for the study; keeping information confidential; protecting the identity of respondents; and measures to keep the information safe. The organisational requirements will be discussed next.

7.3.1.1 Obtaining organisational permission to conduct the study

The researcher was, at the time of writing this thesis, a United Nations staff member and had to adhere to the staff rules and regulations of the United Nations in order to conduct the study. United Nations Administrative instruction 2000/13 (UN, 2000a) in paragraph 4.1 required that:

“... prior authorisation is required to engage in any of the following acts, if such act relates to the purpose, activities or interests of the United Nations:

- a. Issuance of statements to the press, radio or other agencies of public information;
- b. Acceptance of speaking engagements;
- c. Taking part in film, theatre, radio or television productions;
- d. Submitting articles, books or other material for publication.”

Consequently, after consultations with and advice from the Executive Office of the United Nations Department where the researcher worked, and in accordance with United Nations staff rules and regulations, the researcher sought and obtained permission from the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Safety and Security to conduct interviews with United Nations staff members¹. The research also had to take into consideration other organisational requirements set out by the United Nations, such as information sensitivity and confidentiality. This will be discussed next.

7.3.1.2 Confidentiality of information

The researcher was bound by the requirements on information sensitivity as set out by the UN Secretary-General’s Bulletin 2007/6 (UN, 2007a) which listed in paragraph 1.2 the following information as ‘sensitive’ and therefore not suitable for use in the study:

- a. Documents created by the United Nations, received from or sent to third parties, under an expectation of confidentiality;
- b. Documents whose disclosure is likely to endanger the safety or security of any individual, violate his or her rights or invade his or her privacy;

¹ The official United Nations letter with the Under-Secretary-General’s approval is attached as Annexure 1

- c. Documents whose disclosure is likely to endanger the security of Member States or prejudice the security or proper conduct of any operation or activity of the United Nations, including any of its peacekeeping operations;
- d. Documents covered by legal privilege or related to internal investigations;
- e. Internal inter-office or intra-office documents, including draft documents, if disclosure would undermine the Organisation's free and independent decision-making process;
- f. Documents containing commercial information, if disclosure would harm either the financial interests of the United Nations or those of other parties involved; and
- g. Other kinds of information, which because of their content or the circumstances of their creation or communication must be deemed confidential.

To adhere to the above requirement, the United Nations Department where the researcher worked, set out an internal policy document on "Academic Qualifications" dated 13 February 2008, which requires, *inter alia*, his supervisor to review the thesis before it could be submitted to the academic institution should the researcher be unsure whether the thesis contains any confidential information. The researcher, however, was convinced that the thesis did not contain any confidential information as described above. The anonymity of respondents will be discussed next.

7.3.1.3 Anonymity of respondents

Though the research did not utilise or seek confidential, classified or sensitive information, the interview process deliberately provided an opportunity for respondents to provide information which not only reflected the official views and opinions of the organisations they work for, but also their own views, experiences, critique and opinions. To enable and encourage the latter, the researcher decided that he would facilitate an open platform for discussion where the respondents could

express themselves freely. It was imperative, however, to be able to protect the identity of some of the respondents, notably those who felt that for political or personal reasons their identity should be kept confidential. Accordingly, each respondent was provided with the opportunity to indicate to the researcher whether they wished to be quoted anonymously. Each respondent was assigned an alphabetical pseudonym assigned in alphabetical order, 'A' being the first one to be interviewed. Those wishing to remain anonymous were referenced only according to this pseudonym. In these cases, the respondent's real name was known only to the researcher and his academic promoter. (In the end, the names of all of the respondents were removed from the thesis.) These and other conditions and agreements for the interviews were disclosed in the Informed Consent letter which was signed by the researcher and given to each respondent before the interview. The researcher also evaluated all information provided by the respondents to ensure that no confidential, classified or sensitive information, which could possibly contravene the rules and regulations of the United Nations as given in *section 7.4.1.2*: was included in the thesis. The next section will elaborate on the safekeeping of information sourced from the interviews.

7.3.1.4 Safekeeping of information

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:147) pointed out that transcription involves ethical issues such as the protection of the confidentiality of the subject and of persons and institutions mentioned in the interview, the storage of recordings and transcripts, and of erasing the recordings when they are no longer in use. In this regard, the researcher agreed in the informed consent letter to destroy all transcripts and recordings within one year of attaining the Ph.D. Furthermore, all transcripts and recordings were only available for viewing and listening by the researcher and his promoter. Lastly, all electronic copies were stored on a mobile computer hard drive and along with any printouts, were secured in a fireproof safe. All electronic files were password protected and encrypted. The next section will give details on the second phase of the research process.

7.3.2 Phase 2: Designing the interview package

The researcher decided as follows: the interview package had to consist of an informed consent letter, the interview guide, and support material. The support material consisted of:

- A copy of the USG DSS letter providing permission for the study;
- The Darfur Peace Agreement; and
- The mandate of UNAMID.

The last two documents were provided in case the respondent wanted to refer to the written text while answering questions. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The contents of the informed consent letter and interview guide will be discussed next.

7.3.2.1 The Informed Consent Letter

An informed consent letter aimed to protect the privacy of the participants and described the nature of the research study, as well as the involvement of the participants (Mertler, 2008:90). As a minimum, it contained the following (Mertler, 2008:90):

- A description of the research topic and research study;
- A description of what participation would involve;
- An indication that participation was voluntary and can be terminated at any time without penalty;
- A guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity;
- An offer to provide the summary of the findings to the participants; and
- A place for the participants to sign and date the form.

Accordingly, each respondent was provided with a form signed by the researcher, explaining the purposes and focus of the study, and why the respondent was approached to be interviewed. This form was kept by the respondents. It provided the contact details of the researcher, and also set out the confidentiality agreement between the researcher and the respondent, including the assurance to remain

anonymous². The interview guide and the transcripts of the interviews will be discussed next.

7.3.2.2 *The Interview Guide*

The researcher decided to follow the general interview guide approach which lists the questions or issues that are to be explored during the course of the interview (Patton, 2002:343). Following this approach, the guide was prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry were pursued with each person interviewed and also provided topics or subject areas within which the interviewer was free to explore, probe, and ask questions which would elucidate and illuminate that particular subject (Patton, 2002:343). Although the interview guide³ was not given to the respondent to keep, it was signed by the respondent and kept as a record by the researcher. The researcher designed 12 questions to guide the interview process and aimed at answering four of the six main research objectives of the study:

- a. To investigate and identify the political factors which prompted the need for an African Union/United Nations hybrid operation in Darfur, Sudan.
- b. To identify, impart and describe the unique elements and characteristics of a hybrid operation, such as UNAMID.
- c. To determine whether or not a hybrid peace operation such as UNAMID is an optimal mechanism for the United Nations to use in order to maintain international peace and security.
- d. To identify the possible political consequences for future United Nations efforts to maintain international peace and security following UNAMID.

The other two main research objectives were addressed through the literature review and descriptive research in Chapters Two and Three of the study. The interview

² A copy of the Informed Consent Letter is available as Annexure 2.

³ A copy of the interview guide is available as Annexure 3

guide also served as a reference and record for the researcher and contained the name of the person who was interviewed, the date and time of the interview and whether or not the respondent wanted to remain anonymous. Phase 3 of the research process will be discussed next.

7.3.3 Phase 3: The Interview process

The interview process consisted of the interviews themselves and the transcription of the interviews. These two processes will be discussed next.

7.3.3.1 Conducting the Interviews

As was pointed out in *section 7.2.1*, interviews were conducted with a representative sample of a larger population, drawn systematically in order to generalise the findings (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002:87). In qualitative interview studies, respondents may be chosen based on an *a priori* research design, theoretical sampling, or snowball or convenience sampling, or particular respondents may be sought out to act as key informants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002:87). In this study, the researcher conducted focused individual interviews in which the respondents were interviewed for a short period of time (approximately one hour). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:31) described a focused interview as focused on a particular theme, though it is neither strictly structured with standard questions, nor entirely non-directive; instead the researcher has to focus on the research topic through open questions which lead the interviewee towards certain themes but not to specific opinions about these themes. In such cases, agreed Yin (2008:107), the interviews may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but it would most likely be following a certain set of questions derived from the case study protocol. To identify suitable respondents who could provide information on the research questions, the researcher used the following baseline criteria:

- a. The respondents must have been involved, or are still involved, in the planning, setting-up, or management of UNAMID;

- b. All respondents must have had knowledge of international peacekeeping practices;
- c. The respondents must have had a thorough understanding of the political interplay of the African Union and the United Nations; and
- d. The respondents must have been willing to be open and honest with the researcher.

Following the ‘purposeful sampling method’ described in the previous section, the researcher aimed to conduct interviews with leaders or experts on the subject. Such interviews, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:147), were typically labelled as “elite interviews” which normally included people in powerful positions who were known to be difficult to gain access to. Given the potentially sensitive nature and the difficulty to reach the members of the elite group, the process of obtaining participants entailed: a) contacting (email and telephonically) United Nations staff meeting the above criteria, b) informing them about the objectives of the study, c) setting up an interview with the respondent, and d) if there were any follow-up questions or clarifications needed, the respondent was to be phoned or emailed for clarification. Where possible, the support material (as discussed in *section 7.3.2*) was sent via email to the respondent in advance of the interview. All interviews were transcribed as explained in the following section.

7.3.3.2 Transcripts

The ethical issues and confidentiality of transcripts were discussed in *section 7.3.1.4*. The transcription process is described in this section. The primary purpose of transcription was to record the words used in the interview (Sim & Wright, 2000:148). In addition, Sim and Wright, (2000:148) indicated there are other features of the interview that could also be transcribed such as prosodic features (such as emphasis, timing or the rhythm of the speech), paralinguistic features (non-verbal elements of oral communication, such as laughter), and extra-linguistic features (such as facial expressions, shrugs and other body movements). Gillham (2005:124) qualified that it was legitimate to omit the following in the transcripts:

- Most paralinguistic features unless they clearly qualify meaning;
- Speech hesitations such as “um-er”; and
- Other repetitive interjections that do not add anything to the meaning (such as “you know what I mean?” at the end of a sentence).

What should be included in the transcripts were (Gillham, 2005:124-125):

- What the interviewer said as well as the interviewee, but printed in different fonts;
- Clear indications of material that was not transcribed because it is inaudible;
- Appropriate punctuation – speech should not be punctuated other than by pauses and changes in tone and emphasis or it could result in the meaning of the message being scrambled in key passages.

Accordingly, the researcher used a voice recorder to record all interviews prior to transcription. All transcriptions were then analysed to establish certain themes in the attempt to address the research questions. The data analysis is reviewed next in Phase 4 of the research process.

7.3.4 Phase 4: Data analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the research. Data analysis usually involves organising and preparing the data, an initial reading through of the information, coding the data, developing from the codes a description and thematic analysis, using computer programs, presenting the findings in tables, graphs and figures, and interpreting the findings (Creswell, 2009:201). Creswell (2009:185) depicted the analysing process as follows:

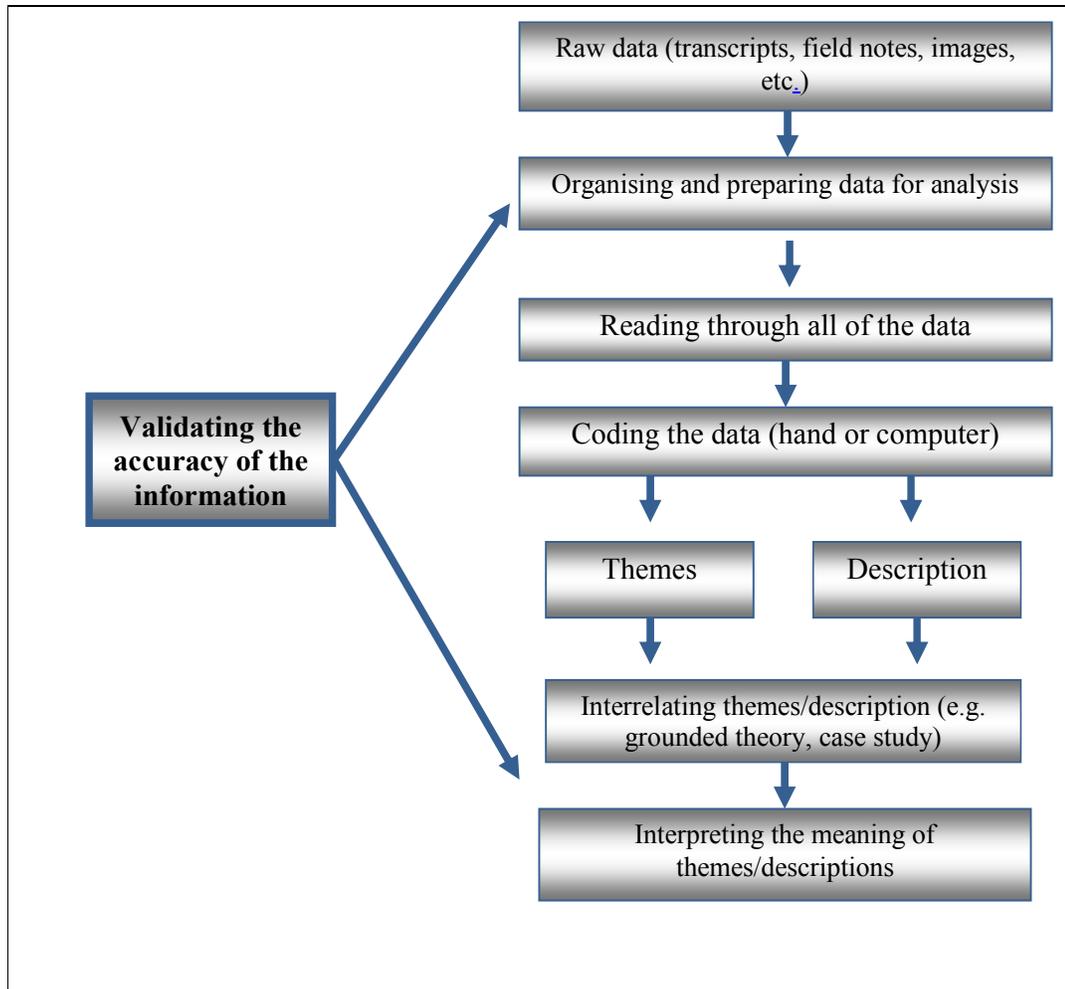


Figure 7.1: Data analysis in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009:185)

Analysis is a process of examining something in order to find out what it is and how it works (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:46) and involves what is commonly termed ‘coding’, which is taking raw data and raising it to a conceptual level (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:66). Coding involves interacting with data using techniques such as asking questions about the data, making comparisons between data, and in doing so, deriving concepts to stand for those data, then developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:66). In this study, the researcher followed the coding method proposed by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003:31-32) as a procedure for organising the text of the transcripts, and discovering patterns within that organisational structure. The steps in this procedure involved outlining repetitive ideas, grouping them into themes/categories, and organising the themes/categories

into larger, more abstract ideas, called theoretical constructs (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003:35-39). To enable this, the researcher used an analysis grid/spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel with the themes at the top and the respondent's pseudonym (A-K) down the side, as suggested by Gillham (2005:142):

	Themes/categories		
Respondents (Pseudonyms)	1	2	Etc.
A			
B			
Etc.			

It was aimed to keep the study valid by correctly deriving inferences from its premises and showing arguments that were sound, well-grounded, justifiable, strong, and convincing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:246). To do this, views and opinions of respondents were compared in order to see what were the trends, concurrences and disparities. Patton (2002:559) argues that the triangulation of different qualitative data sources constitutes a form of comparative analysis. This means comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and means, such as comparing observations with interviews; comparing what people say in private with that what they say in public; checking for consistency in what people say about the same thing over time; comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view; and checking interviews against programme documents and other written evidence that can corroborate what interview respondents reported (Patton, 2002:559). In the final stages of the analysis, the theoretical constructs were tested against grounded theories. The researcher supported at all times his interpretation of the text with examples from data obtained from the transcripts, as suggested by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003:32) who concluded: *“If your interpretation is supported by data, then it is valid, even if there are other ways to interpret the same data.”*

Accordingly, this study had six objectives as outlined in *Chapter One, section 1.5*. Chapters Two and Three fully addressed two of the objectives by means of a literature study. The remaining four objectives of the study are addressed in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Eight. The results and findings of the empirical research are provided in Chapter Eight. Furthermore, in Chapter Eight, the results of the empirical study were inter-correlated and triangulated with the grounded theory (Chapters Two and Three), and with the background, history and facts of UNAMID and the Darfur conflict (Chapters Four, Five and Six). Accordingly, the empirical research focused on the remaining research objectives which were also encapsulated in the interview guide, as described in *section 7.3.2.2*. The above was made clear in *Table 7.1*, which showed the main themes/categories which were based on the research questions/objectives of the thesis:

Research objective	Connected Chapter(s)
a. To analyse and determine the concept of ‘international peace and security’.	two, three
b. To identify and analyse the mandate that lays the foundation and sets out the principles for the United Nations and regional organisations, such as the African Union, to maintain international peace and security.	two, three
c. To investigate and identify the political factors which prompted the need for an African Union/United Nations hybrid operation in Darfur, Sudan.	three, four, five, eight
d. To identify, impart and describe the unique elements and characteristics of a hybrid operation, such as UNAMID.	six, eight
e. To determine whether or not a hybrid peace operation such as UNAMID is an optimal mechanism for the United Nations to maintain international peace and security.	two, six, eight
f. To identify the possible political consequences for future United Nations efforts to maintain international peace and security on the African continent following UNAMID.	eight

Table 7.1: Research objectives and the chapters in which they were addressed

As can be seen in the above table, two of the research objectives were fully explained in Chapters Two and Three while four research objectives were examined partly in a number of chapters. The findings of the analysed data are represented in Chapter Eight.

7.4 CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the researcher opted to use qualitative methods (primarily the analysis of documents and conducting individual focused interviews) to collect data and information on UNAMID as a single, instrumental case study. The data collecting strategies were snowball or chain sampling and critical case sampling. The research process has four chronological phases:

- Phase 1: Ethical considerations
- Phase 2: Design of the interview package
- Phase 3: The interview process
- Phase 4: Data analysis

By following these phases, the researcher sought to ensure that ethical considerations were taken into account, such as the safekeeping of information and the protection of respondents' identities. Data analysis (Phase 4) was aimed at obtaining trustworthy results and drawing well-substantiated conclusions, as will be seen in *Chapter Eight*.