

LITERATURE REVIEW: AN OBLIVIOUS YET GROUNDING TASK OF RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Writing research review is a daunting yet an important task of research writing. Since literature review is an essential part of research paper which highlights the literature as a foundation and as support to new insights emerging from the arguments put forward. Hence, literature review not written properly can ruin the argument of a research. This conceptual paper deals with reviewing the literature in research which at time taken as an oblivious task yet important in building the argument of whole research. The objective of this paper is to make readers understand the importance & purpose of literature review. It also discusses about what literature review is and enumerates how to do literature review for a research paper.

Key Words : Literature Review, Literature Review Process, Reference, Citation

INTRODUCTION

The reviewing of research literature is different from reviewing or critically evaluating an article in magazine, newspaper. This also differs from reviewing a book or research article where one critically examine and evaluate the contents on various dimensions like knowledge, writing style, persuasion, language etc.

This article is broadly divided into two parts. Part one discusses about what literature review is about. And the other part enumerates how to do literature review, and the emphasize is upon the context of writing a literature review for a research paper.

As pointed out earlier that in this article we will limit out discussion regarding literature review to academic paper, here it is important to mention that the focus of academic paper is to develop a new argument and, literature review is an essential part of research paper which highlights the literature as a-foundation and as support to new insights emerging from the arguments put forward. The basic idea of writing

literature review is to justify the research topic, design and methodology. It helps the researcher to not only narrow down its topic of the research, but also to understand it conceptually. It specifies the concept which is being put forward. Moreover, it brings out what has been already done and how it has been done. With the advent of new technologies and heavy dependence on computers we emphasis more on the data analysis in a research and a researcher emphasizes more on the research methodology part. Although, research methodology is one of the important and significant ingredient of any research, one cannot overlook evolution of the problem being researched. Moreover, researchers usually ignore literature review. Before writing literature review, we must understand what do we mean by Literature review and what is the role and purpose of literature review in research. As research defined by Grinnel (1993), "research is a structured inquiry that utilizes acceptable scientific methodology to solve problems and creates new knowledge that is generally

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applicable.” Redman and Mory (as cited in Kothari 2004) defined research as “systematized efforts to gain new knowledge. In research one of the primary objectives is to create new knowledge or adding up to the existing body of knowledge”.

Research tries to either create new knowledge or add something to the existing knowledge. Whatever may be the case researcher must refer to the existing knowledge or the work done related to the area of his/her research. Moreover, any research basically answers the research questions. Since research is a scientific method (Dewey, 1914), the new knowledge has to be built upon existing knowledge. Hence literature review becomes an integral part of any research.

WHAT IS LITERATURE REVIEW?

Before reviewing the literature, it is important to know, what is meant by “the literature”. A literature in research is a collection of all the scholarly writings on a particular topic which is under the study. These writings can be in the form of research paper, peer reviewed articles, doctoral theses, books, conference proceedings etc. It may also include dissertations written by other graduate or post graduate students. So collectively, these make up “the literature”. Now to put “our” research question we need to “review” the literature which is daunting but important part of research process.

Webster and Watson (2002) defined an effective literature review as one that “creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge. It facilitates theory development, closes areas where a plethora of research exists, and uncovers areas where research is needed” (p.13). This definition highlights the rationale of literature review. This (read Literature review) part of the research is the foundation, which helps any researcher to advance the knowledge. Moreover, it facilitates the theory development process in the environment where excess of research exist. In such hyper informative era where a large number of people are doing research, it is important, for the researcher, to clearly draw upon the area

where the ‘research gap’ exists. Hence literature review helps the researcher to focus his area of the study and explicitly define the research questions.

Another aspect of literature review explaining the purpose, has been defined by Hart (1998; P.1), as “the use of ideas in the literature to justify the particular approach to the topic, the selection of methods, and demonstrations that this research contributes something new.” It is important to note that it also mentions that literature review may include the description of methods, demonstrations and approaches of previous works.

We can summarize that a literature review is a critical analysis of published sources, or literature, on a particular topic, which provides a summary, classification, comparison and evaluation for the assessment of the literature.

FEATURES OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Grant and Brooth (2009) illustrated the literature review method seeks to identify previously accomplished work in the research area. Moreover, this method allows for consolidation, summation, avoids duplication and more importantly finding the research gap.

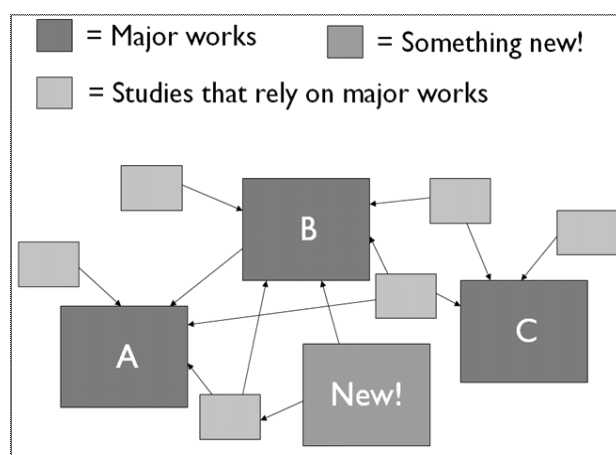
Any research ending to add up the body of existing knowledge which has been evolved due to research gap. This “gap” has been found by the researcher through literature review. Hence, to justify the relevance and exclusiveness of the gap found, the researcher may believe that the literature review is consist of synopsis of key sources, but in the social sciences, a literature review typically has a logical pattern and combines both **summary and synthesis**, often within specific conceptual categories. Here one has to clearly understand that summary is a review of the important information of the source, whereas a synthesis is a re-organization, or a reshuffling, of that information in a way that enlighten how researcher is planning to investigate a research problem. The critical features of a literature review can be summarized as follows:

- It provides a new interpretation of old material or combine new with old interpretations,
- It sketches out the intellectual development of the field, including major debates,
- Depending on the situation, evaluates the sources and advises the reader on the most pertinent or relevant research, or
- Usually in the conclusion of a literature review, identifies where gaps exist in a problem that has been researched hitherto .

PURPOSE OF WRITING LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is an exhaustive exercise through which our argument for research gap emerges and it helps us in connecting the dots. Following diagram demonstrates the purpose of writing literature review in the research.

Diagram 1



Source : <http://libraryguides.missouri.edu/c.php?g=162668&p=1067987> © North Carolina State University Libraries

The Diagram clearly reveals how literature review needs to be written. It starts with major works done in a particular area of the study, along with a number of studies which rely on these major works. Now these studies which rely and are related to the major work may not cover each and every dimensions. Hence, there are gaps or areas which are not explored by anyone prior to this study and which is new to world.

At this moment it becomes important to know the rationale or purpose behind writing the review. Booty and Beily (2005) cited that literature review plays a central role in research as argued by Hart (1999). Moreover he proposes following reasons for writing literature review, to support his argument. As he mentioned that literature review helps in :

1. distinguishing what has been done from what needs to be done,
2. discovering important variables relevant to the topic,
3. synthesizing and gaining a new perspective,
4. identifying relationships between ideas and practices,
5. establishing the context of the topic or problem,
6. rationalizing the significance of the problem,
7. enhancing and acquiring the subject vocabulary,
8. understanding the structure of the subject,
9. relating ideas and theory to applications,
10. identifying the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used,
11. placing the research in a historical context to show familiarity with state-of-the-art developments.

Further, in addition to above points mentioned by Hart(1998), an additional essential reason for writing a literature review is that it offers a framework for relating new findings to previous findings, which can be included in the discussion section of the research paper to establish and justify new research advances.

IMPORTANCE OF A LITERATURE REVIEW

Conducting a literature review is a means of demonstrating an author's knowledge about a particular field of study, including vocabulary, theories, key variables and phenomena, and its methods and history. It also informs the research students and research groups in the field. The literature review is a "legitimate and publishable scholarly document" (LeCompte & colleagues, 2003, p. 124 proof of knowledge, a publishable document, and the identification of a research

family). The scientific reasons for conducting a literature review are many. Borg, and Gall (1996) argue that the literature review plays a role in:

- delimiting the research problem,
- seeking new lines of inquiry,
- avoiding fruitless approaches,
- gaining methodological insights,
- identifying recommendations for further research, and
- seeking support for grounded theory.

In addition to the above the importance of literature review can be summarized as follows:

- It ensures that author may not be the first one to discover.
- It provides acknowledgments to those who had provided the groundwork for the research.
- It exhibits the evolution of the research problem.
- It demonstrates the understanding of the theoretical and research issues related to the research question.
- It expresses the ability to critically evaluate appropriate literature.
- It hints out the ability to incorporate and synthesize the existing literature.
- It resolves the important theoretical issue which fulfills the research gap.
- It offers new theoretical insights for the conceptual framework of the research.
- It induces the acceptability among readers about the proposed research.
- It persuades the readers to consider that the work is significant and substantial contribution to the literature

TYPES OF LITERATURE REVIEWS

Although Grant, Booth, (2009) mentioned about fourteen types of review, but for our purpose where we are considering literature review as a part of any research article we will limit ourselves to later. Labree (2017) in his guidelines to research scholars mentions that, it is important to think of knowledge in a given field as consisting of three stages. Initially, primary studies are conducted by the researchers and they get published in scholarly journals. After

primary studies are published, researchers reviews those studies and offer new interpretations. These interpretations are built from and are often extends beyond those primary studies. Lastly, there are the elucidations, conclusions, opinion, & insights developed, are shared informally that becomes part of the knowledge of field.

In organizing the literature review, it is imperative to note that often this knowledge that is referred as “reality” usually has a meager association to the primary studies and secondary literature reviews. Since the key purpose of literature review is to provide an overview and synthesis of relevant sources researcher had investigated to arrive at the missing links or research gap, the following types of literature reviews helps him to achieve his purpose.

1. Argumentative Review

This form examines literature selectively in order to support or refute an argument, deeply imbedded assumption, or philosophical problem already established in the literature. The purpose is to develop a body of literature that establishes a contrarian viewpoint. Given the value-laden nature of some social science research [e.g., educational reform; immigration control], argumentative approaches to analyzing the literature can be a legitimate and important form of discourse. However, note that they can also introduce problems of bias when they are used to make summary claims of the sort found in systematic reviews.

2. Integrative Review

Consider a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated. The body of literature includes all studies that address related or identical hypotheses or research problems. A well-done integrative review meets the same standards as primary research in regard to clarity, rigor, and replication. This is the most common form of review in the social sciences.

3. Historical Review

Few things rest in isolation from historical precedent. Historical literature reviews focus on examining research throughout a period of time, often starting with the first time an issue, concept, theory, phenomena emerged in the literature, then tracing its evolution within the scholarship of a discipline. The purpose is to place research in a historical context to show familiarity with state-of-the-art developments and to identify the likely directions for future research.

4. Methodological Review

A review does not always focus on what someone said [findings], but how they came about saying what they say [method of analysis]. Reviewing methods of analysis provides a framework of understanding at different levels [i.e. those of theory, substantive fields, research approaches, and data collection and analysis techniques], how researchers draw upon a wide variety of knowledge ranging from the conceptual level to practical documents for use in fieldwork in the areas of ontological and epistemological consideration, quantitative and qualitative integration, sampling, interviewing, data collection, and data analysis. This approach helps highlight ethical issues which you should be aware of and consider as you go through your own study.

5. Systematic Review

This form consists of an overview of existing evidence pertinent to a clearly formulated research question, which uses pre-specified and standardized methods to identify and critically appraise relevant research, and to collect, report, and analyze data from the studies that are included in the review. The goal is to deliberately document, critically evaluate, and summarize scientifically all of the research about a clearly defined research problem. Typically it focuses on a very specific empirical question, often posed in a cause-and-effect form, such as "To what extent does A contribute to B?" This type of literature review is primarily applied to examining prior research studies in clinical medicine and allied

health fields, but it is increasingly being used in the social sciences.

6. Theoretical Review

The purpose of this form is to examine the corpus of theory that has accumulated in regard to an issue, concept, theory, phenomena. The theoretical literature review helps to establish what theories already exist, the relationships between them, to what degree the existing theories have been investigated, and to develop new hypotheses to be tested. Often this form is used to help establish a lack of appropriate theories or reveal that current theories are inadequate for explaining new or emerging research problems. The unit of analysis can focus on a theoretical concept or a whole theory or framework.

STEPS IN WRITING LITERATURE REVIEW

Cooper (1984) suggested literature review process is similar to primary research. If one thing must be realized about conducting and reporting a literature review it is that the stages for conducting and reporting a literature review similar to the process for conducting primary research. With a few modifications, what one knows about conducting primary research applies to conducting secondary research (i.e., a literature review).

- I. Problem Formulation
- II. Data collection
- III. Data evaluation
- IV. Analysis and interpretation
- V. Public presentation

Once you've settled on how to organize your literature review, you're ready to write each section. When writing your review, keep in mind these issues.

Foss and Walters (2007) describe an efficient and effective way of writing a literature review as cited by Golash-Boza Tanya, (2015, July 2). They offer an excellent guide for getting through the massive amounts of literature for any purpose: in a dissertation, thesis, or an article or book in any field of study. Below is a summary of the steps they outline as well as a step-by-step

method for writing a literature review.

- Step One : Decide on your areas of research
- Step Two : Search for the literature
- Step Three : Find relevant excerpts in your books and articles
- Step Four : Code the literature
- Step Five : Create Your Conceptual Schema
- Step Six : Begin to Write Your Literature Review

These steps are further discussed as below:

Step One: Decide on your areas of research

To begin with the literature review it is important to settle on “area” of the research. Further, it is necessary to decide what the areas to cover and what the areas to left. Since with the advent of technology and abundance of resources we have, there are chances that we can easily drift away from our topic. So this is essential to be focused and one should only get scholarly articles, research papers and books in those areas, even if one come across interesting literature in other areas.

Step Two : Search for the literature

Carry out an inclusive bibliographic search of scholarly articles, research papers and books in those areas. Google scholar, Scopus, Science Direct are really useful resources readily available nowadays besides your library. Read the abstracts online and download and/or print articles those are relevant to the area of research. Apart from that relevant books in the library can be checked with. At this point it is imperative to set a specific time frame for how long one will search. Two or three dedicated sessions are suggested to complete the task so as not to fell in the trap of other interesting (read wandering) topics.

Step Three: Find relevant excerpts in your books and articles

Skim the contents of each book and article and look specifically for these five things:

1. Claims, conclusions, and findings about the constructs you are investigating
2. Definitions of terms
3. Calls for follow-up studies relevant to your project
4. Gaps you notice in the literature
5. Disagreement about the constructs you are investigating

After finding any of these five things, type the relevant excerpt directly into a Word document. Don’t summarize, as summarizing takes longer than simply typing the excerpt. It is very important to note the name of the author and the page number following each excerpt, as this will help in citation and referencing; besides it will defend us from plagiarism. This task must be done for each scholarly article, research paper and book that researcher have in their stack of literature.

Step Four: Code the literature:

After getting all excerpts now it is necessary to sort them according to similarities. In order to arrange them logically they should be put together in similar topics. To start with researcher has to figure out what are the main themes. Each excerpts must be allotted to some category. After thorough revising the categorization process, if there are excerpts that can’t be figure out from where they belong them they should be allotted to new categories if needed.

Step Five: Create Your Conceptual Schema:

In this step authors had suggested “to print the name of each of coded themes, in large font”, and cut the titles into individual slips of paper. Take the slips of paper to a table or large workspace and figure out the best way to organize them. Here researcher should look for, the ideas that are going together or the ideas that are in dialogue with each other. Moreover, one has to examine for ideas that contradict each other? This process must be done until one should emerge with a way of organizing the coded themes that makes sense.

Step Six : Begin to Write Your Literature Review

Once the logical order has been found writing can be done from anywhere. Any section of conceptual schema can be initiated. Figure out a mini-conceptual schema based on that theme by grouping together those excerpts that say the same thing. Use that mini-conceptual schema to write up literature review based on the excerpts that has been prepared. Never fail to include the citations, so as not to lose track of, "who said what". This process must be repeated for each section of the literature review.

Once these six steps are completed, complete draft of literature review will be prepared. The great thing about, Foss and Walter's system for writing the literature review process, is that it breaks down complex daunting task into manageable steps something that seems enormous: writing a literature review.

It may be more challenging for research students, unless they are already familiar with the literature. It is always hard to figure out how much you need to read for deep meaning, and how much you just need to know what others have said. That balance will depend on how much you already know. For people writing literature reviews for articles or books, this system also could work, especially when you are writing in a field with which you are already familiar. The mere fact of having a system can make the literature review seem much less daunting.

GUIDELINES TO WRITE GOOD LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is a section just like in any other academic research paper and the objective good literature review is to put forward the argument and justification for the research questions emerged, because of novelty of the study. More logically one organizes his work, more clear for the audience to understand about the research gap in the existing body of knowledge and hence the important and relevant the study is. Researcher should take care about following aspects while writing a literature review to make it interesting, logical and relevant.

- a) **Make use of Information:** As illustrated in diagram 1 that literature review cites the previous major work done and other studies. It also shows the exhaustive coverage about the topic hence interpretation of the available sources must be backed up with evidence [citations] that demonstrates that whatever being said is valid.
- b) **Selective Approach:** Select only the important points in each source to emphasize in the review. The kind of information you prefer to reveal, ought to relate directly to the research problem. Related literature that provide further information but that are not key to understanding the research problem can be included in a list of further readings.
- c) **Cite Quotations:** Always cite quotes, although short quotes are acceptable to emphasize a point, or what an author stated cannot be easily paraphrased. It is also required necessary to quote certain terminology that was coined by the author, not familiar information, or taken directly from the study. It is advisable not to use extensive quotes as a substitute for researcher's summary and interpretation of the literature.
- d) **Summarize and Synthesize:** Always consider summarizing and synthesizing the literature within each thematic paragraph and all through the review. Sum up important features of a research study, but then synthesize it by rephrasing the study's significance and relating it to your own work.
- e) **Maintain Individuality:** As we know that the literature review presents others' ideas, the researcher's idea should remain front and center. Researcher can weave references to other literature into what his writing but at the same time it is essential to maintain his own voice by starting and ending the paragraph with his own ideas and wordings.
- f) **Paraphrase cautiously:** At times when it becomes required to paraphrase any author's work it should represent the author's information or opinions accurately.

g) Citation: Follow APA, MLA or whichever guidelines mentioned by journal or publisher required. Avoid long lists of nonspecific references and if the results of previous studies are inconsistent or widely varying, cite them separately. Cite all relevant references in the review section of thesis, dissertation, or journal article

acknowledge major work done. So, proper citation in required format is necessary format to avoid plagiarism. As mentioned earlier there are different types of literature review which must be written with appropriate approach. It is evident from the discussion that writing a review is small research in itself. The proposed guidelines may help the researcher to come up with better work.

PRECAUTIONS IN WRITING LITERATURE REVIEW

These are the most common mistakes made in reviewing social science research literature:

- Sources in the literature review do not clearly relate to the research problem;
- Adequate time is not spent in defining and identifying the most relevant literature to use in the review related to the research problem;
- Depends exclusively on secondary analytical sources over primary research studies or data;
- Without investigating critically all the aspects of the other's research design, methodology, analysis and findings and accepting as valid.
- Without mentioning the search procedures that were used in identifying the literature to review.
- Reporting isolated statistical results rather than synthesizing them in analytic methods.
- Including only those researches that validates hypothesis and does not consider contrary findings and alternative interpretations found in the literature.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above it is clear that literature review plays an important role in research. It not only highlights the major work done in the relevant field but also develop a new argument which plays a major role in supporting new insights emerged from the arguments put forwarded. It also demonstrates about the understanding of the theoretical and research issues related to the research question of the researcher. Further, it also gives a chance to

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