

Literature Review in Research

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Abstract

The literature review is the most important and first step of the research. It is the review of related books, published and unpublished articles. It helps to develop theoretical background and conceptual framework. Further, it also helps to prepare the research methodology. This article focuses on the process of literature review with illustrations.

Background

A research contains major components: introduction, literature review, research methodology, data analysis/interpretation, findings, conclusion, recommendation, annex (if necessary) and references/bibliography.

The literature review is the first step of the research. The process of literature review begins with a search for suitable topic. Once topic is decided, it is essential process forwarded to review all relevant materials, which carry out the research up to its conclusion. Thus, the research begins with the background information of the research topic. To avoid unnecessary repetition and gaining new knowledge of the society, the literature review ensues its process as one of the most important components in the scientific research process. All good research and writing should be guided by a review of the relevant literature.

The literature review summarizes and evaluates research sources from a body of literature according to the purpose or agenda recognized in the research. It provides background for the discussion that follows and a springboard for new ideas. The goal of writing review is to inform others about certain articles or books said and to tell its valuable agenda which is not covered yet.

The literature review helps to display the problems of the previous research and the parts which are yet to cover in the particular issues. Thus, it goes on with past studies and their conclusions. An attempt should be made to find out the gaps in that particular area of interest so that a further research can be conducted effortlessly. In brief, the literature review provides with known, unknown and untested materials. So, it is compulsory for a researcher to write synopsis of the topic and submit it to the concerned committee. Further, it also helps to develop

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theoretical framework, conceptual framework and hypothesis. In other words, the literature review is an integral to the whole research; it is not just a routine step taken to fulfill formal requirements. Therefore, the literature review is a valuable guide for defining the problems recognized and determines the knowledge of structure, shape and size (S-3) of the research.

The literature review is a critical element of the research process. An extensive review can reveal the existing knowledge and the fill gaps with objectives of the research. Beyond subject content, a literature review can inform research design, reveal important research instruments and connect with other similar research interests.

Therefore, this article will cover following important points regarding the literature review, viz. definition, important, purpose, sources and process.

Definition of Literature Review

A collection of works done by earlier scientists/researchers is technically called the Literature. A literature review is the review of books, articles, dissertations, and other publication, whether it is published or not. So, it is an analysis and a synthesis of research articles on a given topic and it also implies an integral component of the scientific process. A literature review is the mechanism of the research, which is viewed as a cumulative process. Therefore, the literature review will meet the gap of the research paper's objective and past literatures. Thus, the literature review has two main components. They are: a process and a product.

- As a "process," the literature review conducts the survey and summarizes all relevant information related to a specific topic of study.
- As a "product," the literature review reflects the written report that summarizes information within the context of a research study.

Purpose of Literature Review

The main aim of the literature review is to find out "What research studies have been conducted on one's chosen field of study and what remains to be done".

Thus, the literature review reveals a research question no matter it has already been answered by someone else or not. If it has been answered previously, the question often needs to be changed or modified so that an original contribution to the research can be made.

Sources of Literature Review

Literatures can be collected from different sources as mentioned below no matter they are published.

1. Books
2. Journals

3. Encyclopedias
4. Newspapers
5. Thesis
6. CD-ROM Technology
7. On-line Data Bases
8. Internets

Importance of Literature Review

The writing of a literature review helps to gain and demonstrate the skills in two areas:

1. **information seeking:** the ability to scan the literature efficiently, using manual or computerized methods to identify a set of useful articles and books
2. **critical appraisal:** the ability to apply principles of analysis to identify unbiased and valid studies.

In addition to above-mentioned important points of the literature review, it contains some more reasonable areas, which are given below:

- * It is foundation to the present study.
- * It demonstrates the field.
- * It helps to find sources of information.
- * It justifies the reason of the research and will identify the gap, and the research could fill.
- * It emerges a clearer idea on selected problem, which is relevant and significance.
- * It may assist in the refining of the statement of the problem.
- * It helps to investigate new knowledge, idea and results.
- * It helps to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework, conceptual framework, methodologies and hypothesis.
- * It minimizes the risk of pursuing the dead-end in research.
- * It identifies relevant variables, and which helps to include important variables in the study.
- * It determines meaning and relationship among variables.
- * It prevents from duplication and repetition of previous works.

Thus, the literature review becomes the springboard for the whole research.

Process of Literature Review

Purpose and importance of the literature review necessarily follows the identification of definition and it would be better to know the process of literature review under which the researchers must be comprehensible with following questions.

What sorts of questions should be asked during a literature review?

If a research question has not yet been answered satisfactorily, it may be a valid question. Ask questions to yourself about in each book or article you include and determine further research direction to be able to answer the following questions:

- Has the author formulated a problem/issue?
- Is it clearly defined? Is its significance (scope, severity, relevance) clearly established?
- Could the problem have been approached more effectively from another perspective?
- What is the author's research orientation (e.g., interpretive, critical science, combination)?
- What is the author's theoretical framework (e.g., psychological, developmental, feminist)?
- What is the relationship between the theoretical and research perspectives?
- Has the author evaluated the literature relevant to the problem/issue? Does the author include literature taking positions she or he does not agree with?
- How is the basic component of the research design (e.g., population, intervention, outcome)? How accurate and valid are the measurements? Is the analysis of the data accurate and relevant to the research question? Are the conclusions validly based upon the data and analysis?
- How does the author structure of the argument? Can you "deconstruct" the flow of the argument to see whether or where it breaks down logically (e.g., in establishing cause-effect relationships)?
- In what ways, does this book or article contribute to our understanding of the problem under study and in what ways is it useful for practice? What are the strengths and limitations?
- What is the chronological/logical and consistency of the development of knowledge about the subject?
- Are there any gaps in knowledge of the subject? Which openings for research have been identified by other researchers? How can these gaps be bridged?
- Is there a consensus on relevant issues? Or is there significant debate on issues? What are the various positions?
- What is the most fruitful direction for the research as the result of the literature review? What directions are indicated by the work of other researchers?

Some important steps for literature review

On the process of review of literature, a researcher must have literature survey (searching for literatures), and answered questions of the literatures to study it analytically as mentioned above. However, a researcher must be accountable to the following steps:

3. Organize around and relate directly to the thesis or research question you are developing

- Arrange the record cards, pencils/pens. One card is the best for each source
- Go to the Library and consult the card catalogue.

4. Select any concern topic from different sources, viz. books, specific books, journals, thesis and others. Sample 1, 2 and 3 present information of a selected book to search in the library (See Annex 1).

- Focus on specific thesis, problem, or research question.
- Identify type of literature review on issues of theory, methodology, policy, quantitative research or qualitative research.
- Find the source of scope of the research in the literature review from different sources, journals, books, government documents, popular media and disciplines, e.g. economics, population, sociology, or medicine.

5. Identify publications which print abstracts of articles and books in the subject area (research papers previously written in the subject area can help identifying these publications).

6. Identify areas of controversy in the literature.

- Develop skill for the information seeking and critically analyzed the literature.
- Focus on relevant, appropriate, and useful literature review.
- Use catalogue by Authors name, subject matter, or publishers. In general, author's name and title used to search materials.

The essential information is required as follows for various sources when you keep them for the record. (See Annex 2)

Good literature reviews interpret a source on the basis of the source's thesis, argument, and evidence. Sometimes, it is also important to consider the time and place of the source's publication, as well as the character of its author. A good literature review must interpret the source truthfully and accurately.

In addition, the literature review must cite sources clearly in the text and on the reference page. These references should help reader find those resources and pursue their own research.

4. Read the article and highlight relevant points in each of the following sections: problem/issue being researched, sample, findings, discussion and conclusion. If you can't comprehend the finding section due to the statistical analysis, read the discussion section instead for a more coherent interpretation of the findings.

When you read, how to skim the materials?

- Choose the relevant topics/sections and read carefully.

- If you are not sure with relevant topics/sections, check on the table of contents, and headings of different sections.
- Read first and last sentences of each paragraph.

5. Take notes, which will save research time as references can be quickly accessed again and help to develop notes. How will you make notes?

After reading the materials you can make three types of notes:

- Direct Quotations: If a concept is more clear and important, quotation notes must be simulated from author's word without making any change.
- Paraphrasing: In paraphrasing, the author's basic structure is retained but the information is condensed.
- Summarizing: It collects the author's main concepts or basic information. In general, the summarization takes place by one-third of the original material.

The three types of notes will help to develop the major points in the literature reviewed.

6. Evaluate the literatures carefully to develop notes and conclusion so that a reader could solve the following problems:

1. Evaluate an argument;
2. Locate an argument and
3. Compare different arguments.

Evaluation of an argument can be broken down into three important parts:

- Identify the argument,
- The logical consistency of an argument and
- Meeting the objectives set.

A researcher must evaluate the book, article and thesis or research reports. Wolf and Pant (1999) have cited the view of Issac (1972) for the sample designed of evaluation form (See Annex 3).

7. Write summaries for each article including the key points from each of the mentioned sections (e.g., problem, issue, sample etc.) see following section.

How to set a literature review?

Write and rewrite. Since rewriting is always necessary, the first draft does not need to be written in a linear fashion. When one area of the writing proves difficult or premature, it is perfectly acceptable to move to another area and complete the writing of the review in a non-

linear fashion, which can be reorganized in the final draft. (Generally, the introduction or abstract is written last).

Edit and rewrite. Allow time for editing so that the work is clear, concise, and consistent. Avoid jargon that will be unclear to the reader and audience and always prefer the smaller word to the bigger. To test the work's clarity, find an outside reader and read the work aloud as well.

Writing the conclusion. The conclusion should convey and summarize insights learned during the literature review. While the interaction between the research question and the relevant literature is foreshadowed throughout the review, it is usually not directly stated until the conclusion. The researcher can communicate relevant literature is foreshadowed throughout the review it is usually not directly stated until the conclusion. Therefore, the researcher can communicate the new knowledge gained after the review by demonstrating the relationship between the research question and the reviewed literature

8. Synthesize known and unknown results into a summary.

At the end of the literature review a researcher must formulate the qualification of his/her topic and thus the research will begin immediately after presentation of the result of synthesize/ conclusion of the literature review.

For example: If the research topic is

THE EFFECTS OF POPULATION GROWTH ON SELECTED ECONOMIC AND NON-ECONOMIC VARIABLES: A CASE STUDY OF KIRTIPUR BAHIREE VILLAGE PANCHAYAT, CEDECON, TU, 1986.

After making the review of literature, the research paper will fill the gap between the literature reviewed and the objectives of the research as followed with synthesis of known and unknown results.

The studies referred to above reference have covered wide spectrum of demography. It seems that almost no study has been done to deal with population issues incorporating economic and non-economic indicators. These studies have been partial with respect to the treatment of the subject matter. Therefore, the present study could be considered a representative as a pioneering work that has examined the relationship between population growth and selective economic and non-economic variable in Nepalese context.

Conclusion

A literature review is a piece of discursive prose. It is not a list describing or summarizing one piece of literature after another. It's usually a bad sign to see every paragraph beginning with the name of a researcher. Instead, organize the literature review into sections that present

themes or identify trends, including relevant theory. You are not trying to list all the material published, but to synthesize and evaluate it according to the guiding concept of your thesis or research question. Thus, the literature review provides an access to information, knowledge of subject, and analytical mind set.

Annex 1:

Sample reference cards containing complete reference and useful notes:

Sample 1: A sample catalogue card:

519.018
si64u
1998

UNDERSTANDING RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Singh, Mrigendra Lal
1991

Second Edition,
Buddha Academic Enterprises P. Ltd.
Kathmandu, Nepal, 1998.
191pp.

Sample 2: A sample card with note

Freeman, H.E. and Sherwood, C.C. (1970),
Social Research and Social Policy,
New Jersey, Prentice-Hall.

Note:

Tribhuvan University, Library Call 300.18, F877s.
Chapter 5 is useful for evaluation methods.

Sample 3: A sample card with important quotation

Oppong, Christine (1977)

The crumbling of high fertility supports: Data a study of Ghanaian primary school teachers, in John C. Caldwell (ed), *The Persistence of High Fertility*, pp.331-359, Canberra: Department of Demography, The Australian National University, 2 vols.

Family and Fertility Change Series,
Changing African Family Series.

Note:

Quote: "There is evidence indicating that close conjugal intimacy in terms of discussion of plans and domestic issues is a valued ideal which is not often achieved in reality", p.345.

Annex 2:

For Books:

- Surname (family name) and initials of each author
- The year of publication
- The exact title of the work
- The place of publication
- The publisher

Example 1:

Ahuja, R. (2001), *Research Methods*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, India.
(One author)

Wilkinson, T.S. & Bhandarkar, P.L (1999)., *Methodology and Techniques of Social Research*. Himalayan Publishing House, Bombay, India. (Two authors),

Instead of showing all authors, if a book has more than two authors, just write down the first author's name, then et al.

Wilkinson, T.S. et al.(1999), *Methodology and Techniques of Social Research*. Himalayan Publishing House, Bombay, India (More than two).

For Chapters in Edited Books and Monographs:

- Surname (family name) and initials of each author
- The year of publication
- The title of the book
- The surname and initials of the editors (s) of the book.
- The numbers of the first and last pages of the chapter.
- The place of publication
- The publisher

Example 2:

Anker, R., (1991), "Problem of Interpretations and Specification in Analyzing Fertility Differentials: Illustrated with Kenyan Survey Data" in Farooq G.M. and G.B. Simmons (eds), *Fertility in Developing Countries-An Economic Perspective on Research an Policy Issues*, Macmillan Academic and Professionals Ltd., London.

For Journal Articles:

- The surname and initials of the author (s)
- The year of publication
- The exact title of the article
- The name of the journal
- The volume number of the journal
- The issue number
- The month or season of publication (if available)
- The numbers of the first and last pages of the article.

Example 3:

Shakya, K. (1999), "Breastfeeding and Child Survival: Searching Its Mechanism and Pathway of Influences", Nepal Population Journal, Vol.8, No.7, Sept., Kathmandu, Nepal.

For Thesis:

- Surname and initials author's name
- Title of the thesis
- Course of degree
- Name of the University.
- The year of completed thesis.

Example 4:

Shakya, K. (1998), Neonatal Mortality and Maternal Health Care in Nepal: Searching For Patterns of Association, Unpublished Thesis of M.A in Demography, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

News Papers:

- Surname (family name) and initials of each author (s)
- Name of news paper
- The exact title of the article
- Publication day and date
- The place of publication

Example 5:

Shakya, K (1999), Neonatal mortality and maternal health care in Nepal: Ninth Plan (1997-2002), Partly published in Weekly News Paper Deshaymaru Jhya on 8, 15th and 22nd June (in Newari), Kathmandu.

Annex 3:**Form for evaluating a book/article/thesis/research report;****Title:****Name of Journal:****Author:****Publisher:****Year and place of Publication:**

S.N.	Characteristics	Incom.	Poor	Aver.	Good	Excel.
1	Problem is clearly stated					
2	Hypothesis are clearly stated					
3	Problem is significant					
4	Assumptions are clearly stated					
5	Limitations of the study are clearly stated					
6	Important terms are defined					
7	Relationship of the problem to previous research made clear					
8	Research design is described fully					
9	Research design is appropriate for the solution of the problem					
10	Research design is free of specific weaknesses					
11	Population and sample are described					
12	Method of sampling is appropriate					
13	Data-gathering methods or procedures are described					
14	Data-gathering methods or procedures are appropriate to the solution of the problem					
15	Data-gathering methods or procedures are utilized correctly					
16	Validity and reliability of evidence gathered are established					
17	Appropriate methods are selected to analyze the data					
18	Methods utilized in analyzing the data are applied correctly					
19	Results of the analysis are presented clearly					
20	Conclusions are stated clearly					
21	Conclusions are substantiated by evidence presented					
22	Generalizations are confined to the population from which the sample was drawn					
23	Report is clearly written					
24	Report is logically organized					
25	Tone of the report displays unbiased attitude					

NOTE:

Incom.= Incompetent, Aver.= Average, Excel.= Excellent

References

- Ahuja, R. (2001). *Research Methods*. Jaipur and New Delhi: India Rawat Publications.
- Cauvery, R. et al. (2003). *Research Methodology*. New Delhi: S.Chand and Company Limited.
- Wilkinson, T.S. and P.L. Bhandarkar (1999). *Methodology and Techniques of Social Research*. Bombay: Himalayan Publishing House.
- Wolff, H.K. and P.R. Pant (2000). *Social Science Research and Thesis Writing*, Second Edition. Kathmandu: Buddha Academic Enterprises Pvt Ltd.

Book Review

Bama Dev Sigdel (2003). **Nepal's Relation with Japan and China**. Centre for Policy Studies, Kathmandu, Nepal, pp. 192, Price: NRS300.00

Japan and China are two major economic world powers. Nepal's relations with these two countries are historical and circumscribe economic and cultural fronts. These countries are generously assisting Nepal in order that she advances in the development path. In fact, Japan and China are two most important countries that have supported Nepal financially and technically even at present in building physical infrastructure and other socio-economic overheads. The very title of the book explicitly tells us that it is about the analysis of Nepal's economic relation with Japan and China.

Dr. Sigdel's book contains six chapters. The first chapter is on Japan's economy, Aid diplomacy and Japanese aid programme to SAARC countries. The second chapter is about Nepal-Japan economic relation, role of Japanese aid and economic development and assessment of Japanese aid to Nepal. The third chapter describes Japan's trading ties with Asia and Nepal-Japan trade and tourism relation. The fourth chapter talks about China's economic development and Nepal-China socio-cultural, diplomatic, aid and trade relation. The fifth chapter analyses the situation and prospects of Nepal-China investment and tourism relation. The final chapter summarizes the study and prescribes some future course of action to be taken to further Nepal, Japan and China tripartite relations taking into consideration of the problems and prospects towards this direction.

With the presentation of theoretical review, Dr. Sigdel has shown the importance of foreign aid in the economic development of the developing countries in the world. Importantly, he does not lag behind in pointing the negative effect of foreign aid in developing countries like Nepal. Referring to the Janakpur Zone Agricultural Development Project (Nepal), he quotes Gorkhapatra, October 23, 1992, which says, "Millions of rupees worth of the equipment and vehicles are lying useless. The reason behind it was that no thought was given to the question of whether such equipment and vehicles were suitable for Nepal or not".

He has succinctly presented the analysis of Japan's economic growth in the post war period incorporating the historical growth process during the Tokugawa and Meiji periods. He has rightly assessed the Chinese growth process as well referring to Mao's era down to the modern China. He has analyzed Nepal-Tibet trade, which dates back to more than a century.

The author has examined various dimensions of economic activities such as aid, trade, direct investment and tourism between Nepal and Japan and China. The author has rightly depicted that Japan's high economic growth performances were the outcome of the adoption and expansion of high-tech coupled with high level of education, intensive skill and patriotic feeling of the general people in the growth process.

The author opines that it is the Chinese version of 'market socialism' endeavoring to the gradualist approach towards liberalization attracting foreign investment that led to the spectacular growth of the Chinese economy. The Chinese model is a beacon to the developing countries as to how a proper management of foreign investment in the economy speeds up growth and accordingly development becomes a reality. It calls for market reforms in the

developing countries. Following China, Nepal has a lot to learn in pursuing market-oriented reforms. It is beyond doubt that there is a great scope for socio-economic and cultural cooperation between Nepal-Japan and China. This is the main theme of the book, which highlights the future prospects of cooperation between Nepal-Japan and China. It further calls for the continuation of age long cultural and economic relationship between Nepal-Japan and China and emphasizes a new dimension in this relationship through various mutually beneficial collective participations. While assessing the importance of foreign aid in the developing countries, the author has implicitly kept alive the debate on 'trade or aid'. In other words, it is aid that paves way for trade on the part of the developed countries.

Dr. Sigdel has painstakingly gone through more than two hundred references and quoted them to come up with this important book. It would have been more pragmatic and original had the author analyzed the implications of such quotations in the Nepalese context. Similarly, the remark, "It seems that as Japanese aid commenced in Nepal, it provided good jobs and opportunities to its firms and contract companies to do business and has also preview opportunities to the Nepalese brokers, contractors and administrators to earn money for these groups always happened to be safeguarded by the Nepalese government authorities in power" (p.48) should have been avoided. Somewhere the author (on the same page) shows that it is encouraging sort of 'dependency syndrome' in the Nepalese context when he says that there is urgent need to invest heavily in socio-economic sector, the role of Japanese assistance would become inevitable for Nepal.

The author seems to be in hurry in the publication of the book that he could not check some of the typographical, grammatical and technical (Selected Bibliography) errors in it. Some of the titles of the tables are not clear. For example, (X+M) of Table 36 column 4 on page 142 carries no meaning, at least for me. The list of acknowledgement is very long. One can doubt whether all those persons and institutions have actually been contacted.

Despite some minor lacuna, the book depicts contemporary economic relation of Nepal with Japan and China and thus it becomes a resource material to those who are interested to understanding Nepal's relation with both Japan and China. This book would be helpful to the students of Foreign Aid and Trade.

The author has become successful in highlighting the fact that there exists a tremendous scope for economic relation between Nepal-Japan and China with respect to trade, investment, and tourism promotion. Moreover, the author raises some policy issues, which have to be taken into consideration by the respective governments in Nepal, Japan and China for better economic relations in these countries. It is true that both Japan and China can help Nepal in its effort to accelerate the pace of development through investment in various sectors of Nepal's comparative and competitive advantage such as tourism, hydropower, agro-processing, etc. and accordingly help reduce poverty in Nepal.

The author is right when he says that as China will catch up with the western world by 2020 in terms of growth rate, the relation of SAARC countries with China will be of much significance to the governments, entrepreneurs, and concerned persons of the respective member countries of SAARC.

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