Doing a Literature Review in English Language Teaching Research: Practical Suggestions

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Abstract

A literature review serves as a foundation in the research process by identifying, summarizing, and synthesizing existing knowledge relevant to a specific research question. The primary aim of conducting a literature review is to identify and assess the existing body of knowledge relevant to a researcher's specific issue, thereby avoiding the replication of prior studies and situating the research within a coherent framework. This review process involves the systematic identification, location, and evaluation of documents, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative studies, as well as materials from books, government records, and conference papers. A comprehensive literature review not only highlights what has been done but also identifies gaps, guiding the formulation of research questions and hypotheses. This critical assessment serves to contextualize new research within the broader academic discourse, thereby justifying the relevance and methodology of the study. A well-conducted literature review fosters a deeper understanding of the field, promotes methodological rigor, and ensures that new research builds upon a solid foundation of existing knowledge, thereby advancing the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics. This article explores the integral role of literature reviews in research, particularly in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), highlighting their importance in avoiding redundancy, situating new research within a coherent framework, and guiding methodological choices.

Keywords: *Research niche; Research process; Literature review; English language teaching; Conceptual framework; Theoretical framework.*

Introduction

The primary goal of conducting a literature review is to ascertain the existing body of knowledge relevant to the research issue under investigation. Acquiring this information helps researchers avoid inadvertently replicating someone else's study and provides the comprehension and perspective necessary to situate their issue within a coherent framework. Prior research can offer the basis for the research hypothesis and provide hints of necessary actions that assist in justifying the importance of the study.

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Essentially, the review provides the researcher with an understanding of the progress made and the remaining issues that require attention. In essence, the review informs the researcher about what has been done and what still needs to be addressed. According to Gay, Mills and Airasian (2017), "the review of related literature involves the systematic identification, location, and analysis of documents containing information related to the research problem. "A literature review is a written summary of journal articles, books, and other documents that describes the past and current state of information on the topic of your research study (Creswell, 2016, p. 80). Hart (1998) defines literature review as "the selection of available documents" from related literature and "effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed" (p.13). Literature review is thus an examination of a body of related literature in order to connect the significant ideas, documents and arguments presented in the literature to the research question under investigation. However, additional material from books, government records, and conference papers may also be included in a well-written review. Both quantitative and qualitative study articles can be cited while writing a literature review.

As a part of the research process, all researchers perform a literature review, regardless of the information sources they use. The literature review entails the process of finding and comprehending existing knowledge, and subsequently engaging in the discourse from a critical and innovative perspective. As Torraco (2005) puts it, "The integrative literature review is 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" (p. 356). 'Literature' in the literature review means the pertinent sources the researcher consults in order to investigate one's research question or problem. Literature review "provide[s] background information on the research question" and also identifies "what others have said and/or discovered about the question" (Nunan, 1992, p.216). It does not encompass a comprehensive compilation of all the published works pertaining to one's research, but rather a critical assessment of the most pertinent and noteworthy publications. It extends beyond a simple review. Instead, it is a concise, analytical, and evaluative critique of the works. Moreover, during the literature review, it is necessary to demonstrate the connection between the relevant literature and the research question, evaluate its strengths, and identify any potential issues or challenges it may present.

A comprehensive and advanced literature assessment is necessary before doing in-depth and advanced research. According to Boote and Beile (2005, p. 3) "Good" research is good because it advances our collective understanding. To advance our collective understanding, a researcher or scholar needs to understand what has been done before, the strengths and weaknesses of existing studies, and what they might mean. Hart (2005, p. 26) states, "A literature review forms the foundation for the research proper" (p. 26). Researchers are responsible for ascertaining the existing knowledge in the field where they intend to conduct their research before commencing the study. The figure below illustrates the questions that a literature review can address (Pandey, 2024, p. 121).

Figure 1: *Literature Review in Applied Linguistics*
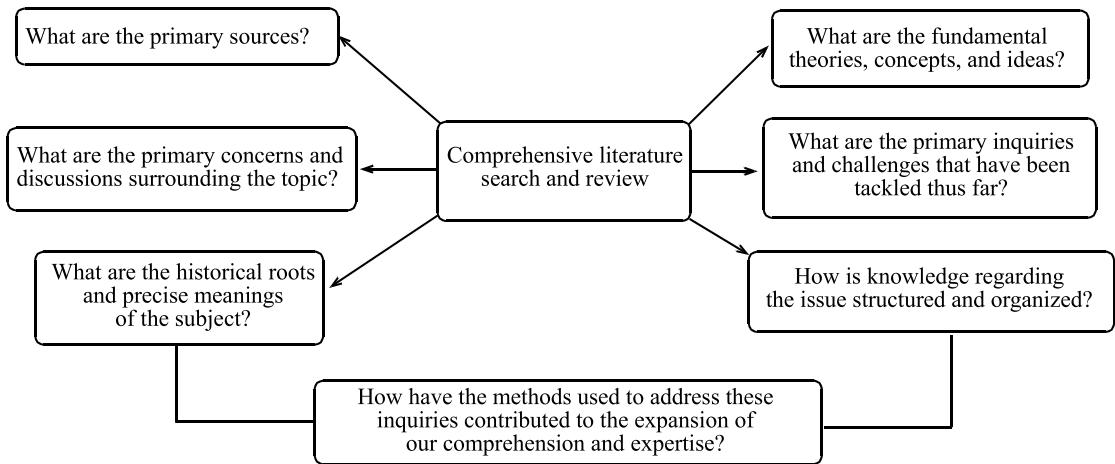
Literature describes what has been done, where it has been done, and how much it has been done. It also describes the results and identifies areas that require further investigation.

The Objectives

The objectives of this article are to outline the fundamental goals and procedures involved in conducting a comprehensive literature review, particularly within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). It aims to elucidate the importance of identifying and evaluating existing research to avoid duplication and provide a coherent framework for new studies. The article emphasizes the need to situate research within the broader academic discourse by critically assessing pertinent literature, thereby guiding the formulation of research questions and hypotheses. Additionally, it seeks to differentiate the roles of literature reviews in qualitative and quantitative research, demonstrating how each approach informs and refines the research process. The article also aims to provide practical steps for conducting an effective literature review, including identifying key terms, locating relevant literature, critically evaluating sources, organizing information, and synthesizing findings. Furthermore, it discusses the significance of theoretical and conceptual frameworks in supporting research questions, methodology, and analysis, ultimately highlighting the role of literature reviews in advancing knowledge and promoting rigorous, relevant research in ELT.

Literature Review in Advancing ELT Research: Functions and Applications

A literature review in English Language Teaching (ELT) research serves several crucial functions. Primarily, it provides a comprehensive overview of existing research relevant to a specific topic, highlighting key findings, methodologies, and theories that have shaped the field. This enables researchers to identify gaps in the current knowledge, thereby guiding the formulation of research questions or hypotheses that address unexplored or underexplored areas. Additionally, a literature

review in ELT helps in contextualizing the research within the broader academic conversation, illustrating how the new study contributes to or diverges from established understandings. It also assists in justifying the chosen methodology by referencing previous studies that employed similar methods, thus reinforcing the research's validity. Lastly, a well-conducted literature review ensures that the researcher is building on a solid foundation of existing knowledge rather than duplicating efforts, promoting a more efficient and effective advancement in the field of ELT. Dornyei (2007, pp. 281-282) identifies four different functions of literature review:

(a)   it can act as the map of terrain', providing a comprehensive and often historical overview of the books, articles, and other documents describing the broader domain under investigation, (b) it can provide the specific theoretical background of the empirical investigation reported, justifying the need for it, thus focusing primarily on works that have a concrete bearing on the research design or the interpretations of the results, (c) it can be used to mark out the intellectual strand/position that the author is aligning with and to generate trustworthiness in the audience by showing that the author is knowledgeable in the area, and (d) finally and related to the previous point, in the university assignments (for example, dissertations and theses) it is also to prove that the author has done his/her 'homework' and has become familiar with a wide range of relevant theoretical and research approaches".

A literature review serves four important purposes in research, as described by Dornyei (2007). Firstly, a literature review serves as a comprehensive map, offering a historical and detailed overview of existing literature in the field. Secondly, it provides the theoretical framework for the research, justifying the necessity of the study and informing the research design and interpretation of results. Thirdly, it establishes the author's intellectual alignment and expertise, enhancing credibility with the audience. Lastly, in academic settings such as dissertations and theses, it demonstrates that the author has thoroughly engaged with and understood the relevant theoretical and research approaches, proving their academic diligence. For Kumar (2014, p.48) a literature review serves the following functions:

(a)   It provides a theoretical background to your study, b) it helps you establish the links between what you are proposing to examine and what has already been studied, c) it enables you to show how your findings have contributed to the existing body of knowledge in your profession and d) It helps you to integrate your research findings into the existing body of knowledge.

Conducting a thorough literature review can significantly enhance the quality and impact of research by addressing several key aspects. First, it brings clarity and focus to the research problem, helping to define and refine the questions aimed to be addressed. By examining how similar problems have been approached, researchers can more precisely target their inquiries and avoid redundant investigations. Second, reviewing relevant studies allows for the improvement of research methodology. By analyzing the methods previously used by others in the field, researchers can adopt best practices and potentially innovate their own approaches, thereby increasing the robustness of their results. Third, a literature review broadens the knowledge base, exposing researchers to a wide range of perspectives and findings within their area of study. This exposure not only enriches understanding but also inspires new angles and ideas for further research. Lastly, it helps contextualize findings within the broader academic discourse. By comparing results with

existing literature, researchers can highlight how their work extends, challenges, or diverges from the work of others, thus contributing to the ongoing scholarly conversation and enhancing the relevance of their research.

Literature Review Approaches in Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Qualitative researchers tend to develop their review after commencing their investigation, while quantitative researchers tend to develop the review before commencing their study. The review of related literature in qualitative research serves several purposes. Firstly, it allows the researcher to uncover the underlying assumptions that inform the research questions. Secondly, it helps to establish the researcher's familiarity with the intellectual traditions in the field. Thirdly, it enables the identification of any gaps in the existing body of literature and how the proposed study can fill those gaps. Lastly, it assists the qualitative researcher in refining their research questions.

In a quantitative study, researchers thoroughly examine the existing literature at the outset of their investigation. This performs two primary functions: it substantiates the significance of the research topic and offers a justification for (and hints at) the objective of the study and the research questions or hypotheses. Authors often incorporate a dedicated part called "Review of the Literature" in several quantitative researches to emphasize the significant significance it plays. The writers also integrate the existing literature into the end of the study, by comparing the findings with previous forecasts or anticipations made at the outset of the investigation.

The objective of the literature review is slightly different in a qualitative inquiry. As with quantitative research, the authors establish or support the significance of the research problem at the outset of the study by citing relevant literature. However, at the outset of a study, authors rarely go into great detail on the literature. As a result, the opinions of the participants are free to be expressed without being limited by those of other authors in the literature. In certain qualitative investigations, scholars use relevant literature to bolster their conclusions. However, at the conclusion of many qualitative projects, researchers present the literature as a comparison or contrast with the main findings of the investigation. When conducting a qualitative investigation, researchers do not anticipate their findings. Their primary focus lies in determining if research outcomes validate or alter established concepts and methodologies presented in scholarly works.

Conducting a Literature Review in ELT Research

Irrespective of whether a study is quantitative or qualitative, there are standard procedures that can be employed to carry out a literature review. Familiarity with these procedures enables researchers to comprehend and interpret a research work. Having a clear understanding of the procedures involved in the research study enables researchers to begin their work and identify when they have successfully finished the review. While there is no specific method for doing a literature review, individuals who intend to create and carry out a study generally follow five interconnected processes.

Identify Key Terms to Use in Your Search for Literature

The initial step involves identifying and selecting keywords relevant to the research topic. These

terms guide the search across various databases and sources. It is crucial to choose keywords that are broad enough to capture relevant literature, but the researcher needs to be specific enough to filter out unrelated studies.

Locate Literature and Consult Diverse Sources

This step requires searching for literature using the previously identified key terms. Creswell (2016) suggests using a variety of sources to ensure a comprehensive search. These sources include academic databases (like JSTOR, PubMed, and Google Scholar) university libraries, and credible websites. Consulting diverse sources helps in covering both published and grey literature relevant to the research topic.

Critically Evaluate and Select the Literature

Once the relevant literature is gathered, the next step is critical evaluation. This involves assessing the credibility, relevance, and quality of the studies. Factors to consider include the publication date, the reputation of the authors and journals, the research methodologies used, and the consistency of the study findings of the study with other literature.

Organize the Literature

After selecting the most pertinent studies, organize them systematically. Creswell recommends abstracting information from the studies or taking detailed notes. Furthermore, developing a visual diagram, such as a concept map or a matrix, can help in visualizing relationships between different pieces of literature and in identifying themes or gaps in the research.

Write a Literature Review

The final step involves writing the literature review, where one synthesizes and summarizes the findings from the selected studies. This review should not merely enumerate studies but should critically analyze them, showing how they connect to the research question, and demonstrating the evolution of the field. This synthesis is crucial for embedding the research within the existing academic discourse and for justifying the relevance of the study and necessity.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks in Research: Definitions, Applications, and Development Processes

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks are often used interchangeably, but they are distinct constructs. Imenda (2014) suggests that a deductive approach to literature review uses theories and theoretical frameworks, while an inductive approach develops a conceptual framework, which may be a model. According to Imenda (2014), a theoretical framework refers to the theory that researchers may choose to guide them in their research. Thus, a theoretical framework is the application of a theory to offer an explanation of an event or shed some light on a particular phenomenon or research problem. In some cases, research problems can be addressed using concepts within theory rather than a theoretical framework. Researchers synthesize existing literature views, both theoretical and empirical, to develop a conceptual framework or model, which provides an integrated approach to the problem, replacing a theoretical framework. Merriam

(1998) contends that the conceptual framework influences every aspect of the study, including the framing of the problem and purpose and the collection of data.

A conceptual framework is the outcome of integrating various interconnected concepts to offer a more comprehensive comprehension of a phenomenon of interest or a research challenge. The development of a conceptual framework is an inductive process in which discrete concepts are assembled to demonstrate potential relationships. Ravitch and Riggan (2012) argue that a conceptual framework allows researchers to make logical and justifiable decisions, connect research questions with those decisions, link analytical tools with research questions, and ultimately direct the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Furthermore, others argue that the absence of a conceptual framework would render the research process devoid of the ability to make logical judgments (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schram, 2003). According to Blaxter (1996, pp. 36-37) conceptual frameworks consist of "defining the fundamental concepts and contexts of a research endeavor, which helps to concentrate the effort. They provide the boundaries for your research, specify the material you should refer to, and propose the methodologies and theories you could utilize."

Using different terminology, Maxwell nonetheless complements Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) by suggesting that: '[Conceptual frameworks are] the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that supports and informs [your] research' (1996, p. 25) and "A concept map, like the theory it represents, is a picture of the territory you want to study, not of the study itself. It is a visual display of your current working theory-a picture of what you think is going on with the phenomenon you're studying" (Maxwell, 1996, pp. 25-37). Mason (1996, p. 14) coined the "term 'intellectual puzzle' to describe the challenges that researchers face when addressing their work's intellectual and theoretical contributions."

From this perspective, a conceptual framework is constructed based on concepts, whereas a theoretical framework is constructed based on a theory. A research study is an intricate system comprised of numerous interconnected components. The theoretical or conceptual framework serves as the cohesive element that connects various components and generates a sense of mutual reliance. Grant and Osanloo (2014) provide a definition of a theoretical framework as the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for a research study. It serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions. The theoretical framework provides a grounding base, or an anchor, for the literature review, and most importantly, the methods and analysis. (p. 12)

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the conceptual framework is a generative source of thinking, planning, conscious action, and reflection throughout the research process. A conceptual framework makes the case for why a study is significant and relevant, and for how the study design appropriately and rigorously answers the research questions… When conceptualized holistically, a conceptual framework serves as the "connective tissue" of a research study in that it helps you to integrate and mobilize your understanding of the various influences on and aspects of a specific research study in ways that create a more intentional systematic process of explicitly connecting

the various parts of the study (pp. 34–35). Thus the guiding sources for constructing a conceptual framework include (a) the researcher, (b) tacit theory or working conceptualizations, (c) the goals of a study, (d) study setting and context, (e) broader macro-sociopolitical contexts, (f) formal or established theory. (2016, p. 40).

This framework serves as a comprehensive guide for the entire research process, allowing researchers to make logical and justifiable decisions. It helps researchers align their research questions with appropriate choices, select analytic tools that are suitable for their research questions, and ultimately steer the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Several scholars argue that a theoretical or conceptual framework is essential for making informed decisions during the research process.

The framework developed for a study plays a crucial role in the research process and final analysis. It is essential to develop and refine the framework, which is the current version of the researcher's map of the territory being investigated. Conceptual frameworks evolve as research evolves, accommodating purpose, flexibility, and coherence. The framework is an iterative process, and an initial framework can be revised to reflect emerging findings and new insights. Weaver-Hart (1988) argues that conceptual frameworks contain an inherent dilemma, as concepts are abstract and frameworks are concrete. The framework evolves and unfolds generatively and recursively as the research progresses, requiring rigor and fluidity in its iterative development and refinement. The development of the theoretical or conceptual framework requires careful, logical, and thoughtful explication, as it is central to the dissertation and its scope is far-reaching.

Difference between Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks are fundamental components of research, each serving unique objectives. A theoretical framework offers a comprehensive explanation that directs the study, based on established theories that are relevant to the research subject. The purpose of this is to establish a connection between the hypotheses or propositions of the researcher and the fundamental principles and variables within a broader theory. This connection serves as a framework for interpreting the findings. On the other hand, a conceptual framework, which is generally based on the theoretical framework, defines the precise ideas or concepts that the study will focus on. The researcher's synthesis of literature provides a framework for addressing the study problem, outlining how variables will be measured and guiding the process. Theoretical framework establishes the connection between the investigation and the broader area of knowledge, while the conceptual framework focuses specifically on the subject and demonstrates the relationship between variables.

Table 2

Theoretical Framework vs Conceptual Framework

Features	Theoretical Framework	Conceptual Framework
Definition	Based on theory in the form of model or paradigm which serves as a basis for study	It is the researcher own model showing variables that can specify the paradigm and shows the direction.
Based on	Based on the existing theories or theories in the literature which has been tested and validated by other scholars	Based on concepts which are main variables in the study.
Specification	It mainly specifies by providing a general or broader set of ideas within which a study belong	It manly species by narrower the idea a researcher can utilize in study broader set of ideas within which a study belongs.
Nature of the model	It is in the form of model that pivots a study with its exponents and results of their study	It is researcher's own constructed model that is used to explain link which exists between main variables of the study
Connected with	Theories	Concepts
Features	General less structured, loosely defined, derived from theories, that already exists, focal point that provides and a basic foundation of research study	Very specific, defined structure, no ambiguity in definition
Best Suited for	Quantitative research	Qualitative research

Developing Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

The process of conceptualizing and developing a theoretical framework for a study involves an iterative, generative, and reflexive approach. It involves reviewing relevant research literature for relevant theories, concepts, and analytic models. The selection of theories depends on appropriateness, ease of application, and explanatory power. Some strategies for developing a framework include:

1. Consider your title of the study and research problem. The research problem acts as the basis for your investigation and directs the creation of your theoretical or conceptual framework.
2. Examine a philosophical framework, theoretical perspective, or relevant concepts that serve as the basis for the specific issue discussed in your dissertation. Participate in a systematic process of developing and exploring all possible possibilities or ideas.

3. Analyze pertinent social science theories and choose one or more that can clarify or offer understanding of your study problem and purpose.

4. Initiate a dialogue with your advisor to discuss the assumptions or assertions of these theories, particularly in relation to their potential relevance or connection to your research.

The process of building a framework for qualitative research is cyclical and iterative, requiring deep thinking, critical analysis, creativity, and innovation. The framework generates the focus of the research and guides it as it is derived from it. It is common to develop and discard multiple theoretical or conceptual frameworks until one is chosen. A review of literature for similar studies can reveal the types of frameworks other researchers have used. Reading literature review chapters or sections of dissertations and journal articles can help understand how other scholars approached the topic. The following table can help researcher to review theoretical or empirical literature.

Author/title	Objectives	Framework	Design	Sample	Variables & Instrument	Results	Limitations

Purposes of Reviewing Theoretical Literature

The review of theoretical literature is aimed at identifying and discussing the established theories relevant to your research topic. These theories provide a lens through which the research problem can be viewed and understood.

Identify Relevant Theories

Start by identifying theories that have historically framed research in your area of ELT, such as theories of second language acquisition (SLA), motivation theories in language learning, or sociocultural theories.

Critically Analyze

Analyze these theories critically to discuss their strengths, weaknesses, applicability, and any controversies surrounding them. Highlight how they have been applied in ELT research, what findings they have helped generate, and where they might fall short.

Establish Theoretical Framework

This review should be used to establish the theoretical framework of the study, explaining how the chosen theories underpin the research questions, methodology, and analysis.

Creating a Research Niche

A literature review aims to establish a research niche by analyzing existing literature, identifying gaps, and demonstrating the need for further research.

So how do we do this? To identify a gap in literature and create a research niche, one can identify inconsistent findings or contradictions in prior research, such as the benefits of teacher's vs. peers' feedback for second language (L2) high school students' oral skills and the effects of explicit vs. implicit feedback.

Another way is by identifying an aspect, issue, variable, or something that has not been controlled for and is in need of further research. A third way is by extending research beyond its existing territories or domains.

Mackey and Gass (2005, p.17) emphasize the importance of current research investigations, which may involve unanswered questions or partial answers that require further investigation. This information can serve as a basis for a study or follow-up, assuming other researchers have not conducted such studies. The purpose of a literature review often includes a clear set of research questions and a description of the gap in the literature. Creating and explaining your research niche is primarily based on the belief that you have something valuable or unique to say for instance:

a new or different sample of data, a further confirmation of existing theory/perspective/research, an extension (theoretical or pedagogical) to existing theory/perspective/research beyond its current territories and boundaries, a challenge to existing theory/perspective/research, an application of a certain theory, perspective, research, or mode, a research agenda to propose (theoretical or pedagogical), a way of evaluating and moving the field forward. (Shehadeha, 2015, pp.171-172)

Secondly, this assumption relies on your capacity to effectively communicate this belief to the reader, editor, or reviewer who is interested. Thirdly, it assumes that you possess the skill to accurately express this belief in writing, adhering to the relevant publishing conventions and guidelines.

To create a niche for their research, one should consider the following factors: making an original contribution to the field, providing implications for practitioners, or contributing to theoretical interest. If the paper is not met with a "so-what" question, it may not be read or published. To answer this question, one should consider whether the research meets key publication criteria, such as making an original contribution, providing implications for practitioners, or contributing to theoretical interest. It is not enough to identify a gap in the literature; it is also important to demonstrate the value of the research and justify its contribution to the field and related literature. For this Shehadeha (2015) suggests the researcher to use "why," "what," and "who" questions as a guide:

What is the gap that you perceive in the literature? What briefly is your topic? And what are your research questions? When did you understand that there was a gap in the literature? Where does your study fit into the literature? Why would anyone care? Why is your research necessary, even valuable? Answering these two questions responds directly to the "so-what" question. How does

your study fill the gap in the literature? Who will care ? Students? Teachers? Administrators? Other researchers? (pp. 171-172)

Reviewing Empirical Literature

In contrast to purely conceptual work, empirical research focuses on the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data that can be sensed or experienced in some way, either to answer research questions, to test hypotheses derived from theories, and/or to develop hypotheses or theories. Examples of different forms of empirical research, according to the AERA, are experimental research, survey research, participant observational research, audiovisual recording analysis, in-depth interviewing, and empirical historiography.

Reviewing empirical literature in ELT research involves a thorough and systematic examination of previously published studies that have employed empirical methods to investigate issues within the field of ELT. Empirical literature refers to studies that have conducted original research, including experiments, surveys, case studies, and observations, focusing on practical aspects of language teaching and learning. This review helps you understand the current state of research in your area of interest, identify gaps in the knowledge, and justify the necessity of your study.

In conclusion, a detailed review of empirical literature in ELT and Applied Linguistics involves a meticulous process of searching, summarizing, critiquing, and synthesizing previous research. It establishes the context for current studies, highlights existing knowledge, and identifies gaps that new research can fill. This foundational work is essential for advancing knowledge in the field and ensuring that new studies are meaningful and built upon established research.

Purposes of Empirical Literature Review in ELT Research

An empirical literature review in ELT research fulfills multiple essential functions. Primarily, it provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing empirical studies, enabling researchers to understand the current state of knowledge and identify gaps in the literature. This process helps in framing research questions that are both relevant and original. Additionally, reviewing empirical studies offers insights into the methodologies and analytical techniques that have been successfully implemented, guiding researchers in designing robust studies.

Establishing a Foundation of Existing Knowledge

Empirical literature reviews help to map out the existing research landscape in ELT. They compile and synthesize previous studies, offering a comprehensive overview of what has been explored, findings, and the methodologies used. This foundational knowledge is vital for situating new research within the context of what is already known.

Identifying Gaps in Research

By reviewing empirical studies, researchers can identify gaps in the current knowledge base. These gaps might be in specific areas of language teaching, under-researched teaching methods, or demographic groups that have not been adequately studied. Identifying these gaps is essential for advancing the field and suggesting areas where further investigation is needed.

Informing Research Questions

A well-conducted literature review helps in formulating relevant research questions. By understanding what has been previously explored and where the gaps lie, researchers can craft questions that are insightful and address unexplored or underexplored areas in ELT.

Guiding Methodological Approaches

Empirical literature reviews often discuss the methodologies used in previous studies, which can inform and guide the methodological approach of new research. Researchers can learn about the advantages and limitations of various methods and choose those that best suit their specific research questions and contexts.

Providing Evidence for Theoretical Frameworks

Literature reviews support the development of theoretical frameworks by linking empirical findings to theoretical concepts. This linkage helps in understanding how specific theories have been applied in practice and how they might be refined or challenged by new research findings.

Enhancing Rigor and Relevance

Reviewing empirical literature ensures that new research is both rigorous and relevant. It allows researchers to build on the existing body of knowledge rather than duplicating past efforts. Furthermore, it ensures that the research addresses significant issues that are grounded in real-world educational contexts.

Purposes of Theoretical Literature Review in ELT

Theoretical literature reviews in English Language Teaching (ELT) research provide a foundational understanding of key theories and conceptual frameworks, enabling researchers to situate their studies within the broader academic conversation.

Identify and Evaluate Theories

The review should identify relevant theories that have been previously developed in the field of ELT and related disciplines. It involves a critical evaluation of these theories, assessing their strengths, weaknesses, and applicability to current challenges in language teaching and learning.

Establish a Theoretical Framework

By synthesizing the theoretical literature, you can establish a framework that guides your study. This framework provides a lens through which your research questions can be explored and understood. It helps to explain why certain phenomena occur and predicts potential outcomes of your study.

Bridge Theory and Practice

A thorough theoretical review demonstrates how abstract concepts are translated into practical teaching and learning strategies within ELT. It shows the evolution of theoretical insights into pedagogical methods, curriculum design, assessment practices, and more.

Structuring the Review

In English Language Teaching (ELT) research, structuring a literature review involves a systematic organization of the existing literature to establish a foundation for the study. A well-structured review should begin with an introduction that outlines the scope and objectives of the review, setting the stage for the topics to be discussed. This is followed by a thematic organization of the literature, where studies are grouped based on common themes, methodologies, or chronological developments.

Chronological Structure

You might organize the review chronologically if your focus is on how theories have evolved over time within ELT.

Thematic Structure

A thematic organization groups literature based on key themes or theoretical areas, which can be particularly useful for multidisciplinary studies.

Methodological Structure

For studies emphasizing research methodology, organizing the review according to different research methods and their theoretical underpinnings can be effective.

Characteristics of a Good Literature Review

An effective literature review must fulfill certain criteria, encompassing the pertinent material and integrating it with lucidity. Journal papers typically have length constraints, requiring the literature review section to focus solely on the essential aspects relevant to the argument. Dissertation guidelines and handbooks (Boote & Beile, 2005) outline the essential elements of a literature review, which can also be used to research papers.

Coverage

The text must include pertinent references. It is not simply about mentioning many authors, but rather about recognizing and presenting the pertinent literature, the primary research directions, and constructing a framework in which the study may be situated. It is akin to creating a map that highlights important locations and indicates the specific position of the paper argument inside that map. The matter of length necessitates careful consideration, and as a fundamental principle, it is consistently preferable to engage in an in-depth exploration of the subjects that the paper explores, rather than providing a shallow summary of many viewpoints.

Synthesis

An effective literature review goes beyond being a mere compilation of citations; it should succinctly describe and establish connections between pertinent references. Synthesis involves more than simply combining references and thoughts. In order to present a unique perspective on a topic, such as a model or framework, the author must demonstrate originality and incorporate their own developed expertise (Torraco, 2005). The synthesis might be expressed as interrogatives

or statements that must be validated or addressed through field research. Additionally, it can present a model or framework that will be examined or implemented in the empirical portions of the research.

Rhetoric

The language must be clear and cohesive; concepts must be conveyed in a well-written prose that does not make unjustified claims.

Significance

The review must also demonstrate the practical and theoretical significance of the research problem. We highly recommend that the research topic should demonstrate theoretical features and also document organizational contributions, as demonstrated in the study by Abbariki et al. (2017), which highlighted the central importance in the introduction of the paper. An effective literature review achieves a balance between suitable breadth and depth, rigor and consistency, clarity and brevity, as stated by Hart (1998, p.2). It involves a thorough examination and synthesis of the identified literature. Consistency and clarity are crucial since they contribute to a logical and cohesive argument, while depth and rigor demonstrate the author's mastery of the subject matter, resulting in a well-elaborated argument. Ultimately, conciseness is crucial, as it is necessary to present, analyze, and communicate all pertinent literature within a confined space. Upon completion of the literature review, individuals should possess the ability to respond to the subsequent inquiries: What are the primary sources pertaining to the subject being investigated? What are the fundamental theories and concepts that provide support for the claims made in the paper? What is the connection between the argument of the paper and a significant issue or discussion surrounding the topic? What are the fundamental ideas presented in the argument of the paper and how are they precisely defined?

Conclusions

Conducting a comprehensive literature review is an essential component of the research process in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). It allows researchers to situate their work within the existing body of knowledge, avoiding unnecessary duplication and ensuring that their study contributes meaningfully to the academic discourse. The literature review helps in identifying gaps in current knowledge, formulating research questions, and justifying the chosen methodology. By critically assessing and synthesizing pertinent literature, researchers can develop a robust theoretical or conceptual framework that guides their study, enhancing its relevance and rigor. This process not only provides clarity and focus to the research problem but also broadens the researcher's knowledge base, inspiring innovative approaches and new perspectives.

Moreover, the literature review serves as a foundational element that supports the empirical and theoretical underpinnings of a study. It is indispensable for contextualizing findings within the broader academic conversation, illustrating how new research extends, challenges, or diverges from established understandings. By integrating insights from both qualitative and quantitative research, a well-conducted literature review enhances the overall quality and impact of the

research. It ensures that the study is built on a solid foundation of existing knowledge, promoting more efficient and effective advancements in the field of ELT.

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