

# Engaging with Review of Literature in Research

Saleem Dhobi, PhD

Asst. Professor of English  
Patan Multiple Campus, T.U.  
[saleemphd.tu12@gmail.com](mailto:saleemphd.tu12@gmail.com)

doi: <https://doi.org/10.3126/ppj.v4i01.70207>

## Abstract

*This paper has delved into the conceptual clarity of literature review, its elements, the reasons for writing literature, the structural foundation, and challenges that researchers undergo when preparing to write the review of literature. The article has aimed to educate the readers about the methods of writing literature review for academic purpose. The major exploration is the researchers without being aware of the authenticity, credibility, and currency of the materials cannot help to be up to date with the existing significant development in the field of the study. Their primary task is to gather relevant and reliable information on the topic before beginning to write the literature review so that they can fit it in their dissertation. The article has employed the qualitative research design with the focus on the secondary data on the literature review. The university students can benefit from this article a lot when they commence to write the literature review for their dissertations or theses as the partial requirements of their academic degrees.*

**Keywords:** Review, research, qualitative, quantitative, analysis, dissertation

## Introduction

The paper discusses multitude of literature review as accomplished when writing a research paper or dissertations in both social sciences and management. A literature review uses as its database reports of primary or original scholarship, and does not report new primary scholarship itself. The primary reports used in the literature may be verbal, but in the vast majority of cases reports are written documents. The types of scholarship may be empirical, theoretical, critical/analytic, or methodological in nature. Second a literature review seeks to describe, summarize, evaluate, clarify and/or integrate the content of primary reports (Cooper, 1988). A review of the literature is a classification and evaluation of what qualified scholars and researchers have written on a topic. Occasionally researchers including university students write one as a separate assignment. In writing the literature review, the purpose is to convey to readers what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. As a piece of writing, the literature review must be defined by a guiding concept (e.g., research objective, the problem or issue being explored in the dissertation). It consists of an overview, a summary, and an evaluation of the current state of knowledge about a specific area of research. It may also include a discussion of methodological issues and suggestions for future research. Besides enlarging

the researchers' knowledge about the topic, writing a literature review lets them gain and demonstrate skills in two areas:

- a. Information seeking: the ability to scan the literature efficiently, using manual and computerized methods, to identify a set of useful articles, books and documents;
- b. Critical appraisal: the ability to apply principles of analysis to identify unbiased and valid studies. A literature review must do these things:
  - be organized around and related directly to the thesis or research question being developed
  - synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known
  - identify areas of controversy in the literature
  - formulate questions that need further research

## Discussion

This paper discusses the diverse aspects of literature review including what literature review is, why it is written, how it is organized and what different features it embodies. A literature review is a body of text that intends to review the critical points of existing knowledge on a particular topic. Literature reviews are secondary sources as they do not report any new or original experimental work. It is the knowledge based on the primary work undertaken as the field of study by the previous researchers. According to Bruce (1994), the review of pertinent literature is virtually always a standard chapter of a research work or dissertation accomplished for the academic degrees. It constitutes a significant chapter the dissertation that aims to establish a context in which the topic is relevant. Bruce has further stated that review of literature comprises of a search, a survey, and a means of learning, a research supervisor and a final research report (1994). He has mentioned the basic elements of literature review that embodies the elements as aforementioned. Sharma (2007) defines literature review as a collection of materials on a particular topic that can be from a set of government documents and scholarly articles.

According to Fernando Antonio Ribeiro Serra (2015, September), the literature is essential to the research because it forms the basis and influences the conceptual model, propositions, and hypotheses. It serves as the foundation for the results' discussion. To put it briefly, the dissertation's overall coherence is enhanced by its positioning in relation to previous research. An organized review facilitates the process of elucidating the gaps and the contribution while demonstrating the advantages an article offers to its field (p.2). A research question focuses on a gap to be filled in existing knowledge. The literature review needs to direct and identify arguments that justify the gap that needs to be filled. The literature needs to be directed and focused on the objectives of the study (Serra, 2015, September, p.3). According to Andrew S. Denney & Richard Tewksbury (2013), a literature review entails a thorough summary of past studies on a particular subject. The summary presents information on what is currently understood about a subject, as well as what remains unknown, laying the groundwork for a new study to address these gaps in

knowledge. This new investigation is the focus of the literature review (p. 218). Debora F.B. Leite et al. (2019, September) have stated that the literature review identifies the latest knowledge in a specific field, explains existing information, clarifies the implications of the analyzed problem, connects theory with practice, points out deficiencies in the current literature, and positions the dissertation/thesis within the research agenda of that field. Furthermore, through writing the literature review, postgraduate students grasp the subject's structure and expand on their cognitive associations while analyzing and summarizing data with growing maturity (p. 1). The literature review helps to examine assess and contrast diverse perspectives and theories. However, it does not discuss the research implications. The researchers need to write a comprehensive literature review when reflecting on their findings (p. 2). The intensive review of literature leads the researcher to exploring new knowledge on the topic. The results of the literature review in a postgraduate dissertation.

### *Elements of Literature Review*

The review of literature is organic. It embodies diverse segments that shape a comprehensive writing for gaining knowledge on the current information on the topic of the study. Oluchi Precious Ogbonna et al. (2022) have stated that the key components of literature review are as follows:

- a. Introduction: The introduction talks about what the chapter contains. The general breakdown of the chapter applies to academic writing.
- b. Literature Review: The literature review is usually of two components – the theoretical literature and the empirical literature. Theoretical literature refers to what works and authors conceptualized that are usurped as not only foundational but irresistible pathways as far as research of similar elements are concerned and empirical literature indicates the practical investigations and reviews of tested case studies. The empirical literature can go beyond the theorists and concept builders to the level of consistent scholars in drawing empirical models from any theory.
- d. Gaps in Literature: The gap in literature refers to what has not been said and/or other ways to say what had been said. This is to state that gaps in literature might not focus only on what has not been said or covered alone. Most researchers are blinded by the limiting assumption that their work covers a critical aspect that has never been covered by any researcher before. Importantly, gaps in the literature include finding other use as well as a limit on what has been vastly covered (pp. 5-6).

### *Types of Literature Review*

The researchers in universities are generally expected to choose any one of the research designs including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Hence, the paper discusses only two types of literature review: qualitative and quantitative as accorded by Andrew S. Denney & Richard Tewksbury (2013, pp. 222-223).

- a. Qualitative: For qualitative research questions, literature reviews need to focus on how a research question is shown to be needed to be addressed. This means that in a

literature review for a qualitative study, there needs to be an all inclusive approach to the general research topic. Besides, there needs to be only a minor degree of focus on the methods of previous studies and more focus on the specific findings of prior studies.

For qualitative studies, the limitations generally are related to particularistic (i.e. small) samples that are examined. It is often the case with qualitative studies that the literatures review borrow from several different arguments to construct one all-inclusive theme. This all-inclusive theme helps in demonstrating why a new approach that prior studies have not done or completed is needed.

By drawing on multiple arguments, it simultaneously strengthens the argument being made throughout the current study and gives confidence to the readers that the current topic has been researched densely.

- b. Quantitative: Literature reviews for quantitative studies need to discuss both what previous studies pertaining to the research topic have found and how such studies were accomplished in terms of the specific variables used. Reviews used to introduce and set up quantitative studies focus more heavily on the methods used in prior studies when compared to qualitative studies as well. The methods that need to be present in the literature review are both those that in previous studies are common as well as those that represent new “advances” in how to do a particular conceptual definition, measurement, or analysis. This primarily depends on the specific variables and how prior research has been conducted on the research topic.

It may be best to think of quantitative literature reviews as defining and describing the shapes of pieces of a puzzle in order to construct the complete focus of the intended research topic. Here, the literature review needs to show how particular variables and/or findings are common (or not) across the field of existing studies about the current research topic. By providing documentation of particular variables and findings, this approach facilitates readers having more confidence in the validity and reliability of the findings in the current study.

### *Why to Review Literature*

The primary reason the researchers undertake the assignment of writing literature review to update them with the current knowledge on the topic of the ongoing argument. University of Leicester (2009) mentions the reasons of why the literature review is accomplished. When readers come to our dissertation, they do not just assume that our research is a good idea. They seek to be persuaded that it is relevant and that it has been worth doing. They might ask the following questions:

- What research questions are we asking?
- Why are we asking them?
- Has anyone else done anything similar before?
- Is our research relevant to research our field?

- What is already known about this topic?
- How might our research add to this understanding, or challenge existing theories and beliefs? (p.1)

When we have a first draft of our literature review it is possible for us to assess how well we have achieved our aims. One way of doing this is to examine each paragraph in turn, and to write in the margin a very brief summary of the content, and the type of content e.g.: argument for; argument against; description; example; theory; link. These summaries then provide the outline of the story we are telling, and the way that we are telling it. Both of these are important and need to be critically reviewed. When explaining the why, we need to ask some questions including, what the balance between description and comment is, whether we have missed out any significant dimension of the literature, if we have supported the development of each step in our argument effectively, whether the material is presented in the most effective sequence, whether there are places where readers are left with unanswered questions, if every reader of our research question is supported by the preceding material, if we have explained to the readers the relevance of each piece of evidence, whether there is any material interesting but does not contribute to the development of the ongoing argument, if we have explained the justification for the research topic amply, if our references are up to date, and how effective our linking of all the elements is (University of Leicester, 2009, p. 8).

#### *When to Review Literature*

With small-scale writings, the literature review is likely to be done only for one time that is before the drafting begins. With longer research works including dissertations for a Masters Degree, and doctorate degree, the literature review process is more extended. The review of literature is needed at three stages. The first it is needed to establish the context and rationale for our study and to confirm our choice of research questions. The second it is done when the study period gets longer and we need to make sure that we keep in touch with current, relevant research in our field published during the period of our research. The final we do it when we prepare our final dissertation. We do it here to relate our findings to the findings of others, and to identify their implications for theory, practice, and research (University of Leicester, 2009, p.2).

#### *How to Organize Review of Literature*

Literature review has a structure which is significant and mandatory in many universities. The structural frameworks may be different from researcher to researcher. However, a normal structure of a review of literature can be in one of the following patterns:

- a. Chronological form: we do not just list items of information in terms of time. Rather we need to write critically.
- b. Thematic form: This form is useful provided that there are several strands within our topic that can logically be considered separately before being brought together.
- c. Sectarian form: It can include political background, practice background, methodological background, geographical background, literary background.

- d. Development of ideas: This could be useful when there are identifiable stages of idea development.

There are numerous possible structures, and we need to establish one that best fits the 'story' we are telling of the reason for our study. After we have established our structure, we need to outline it for our readers (University of Leicester, 2009, p. 6).

#### *Significance of Literature Review*

Literature reviews are important for a number of reasons. First literature reviews force researchers to educate them on as much information as possible pertaining to the topic chosen. This both assists in the learning process, and it also helps make the writing as strong as possible by knowing what has/has not been both studied and established as knowledge in prior research.

Second, literature reviews demonstrate to readers that the researcher has a compact understanding of the topic. This provides credibility to the researcher and integrity to the work's overall argument. Besides, by reviewing and reporting on all prior literature, weaknesses and shortcomings of prior literature become more apparent (Denney & Tewksbury, 2013, p. 219). The review of literature incorporates identification of what research has been performed and what topics require further investigation in a particular field of knowledge, the establishment of the context of the problem, the recognition of the main methodologies and techniques used in the past, and the positioning of the current research work within the historical, methodological and theoretical context of a particular field. By examining the literature review chapter, the readers anticipate what to expect from the remaining sections of the academic text.

#### *Challenges in Drafting Review of Literature*

The common challenges researchers face while writing literature review are as follows:

- a. Accessing relevant materials: A researcher usually faces the challenge of accessing the relevant materials to determine relevant in terms of currency, adequacy, and suitability.
- b. Identifying reliable sources of literature: A researcher usually faces the challenge of sorting the reliable literature. To overcome this problem, the researcher has to have a mastery of the subject matter.
- c. Being able to assess, synthesize and integrate the current literature into the research work: For a literature review to fit adequately into a study and serve its purpose, the researcher must first appraise what has been written in the subject matter by scholars who are experts. The researcher should interrogate the literature either to critique it and establish relevance and currency and/or synthesize it to fit into the argument. The existence of abundant and relevant literature sometimes confuses a bit sluggish researchers. Consequently, they get to copy and paste for their comfort.

- d. Not adequately grasping a particular theme of literature before integrating it into their research work: Researchers face this problem when they are new in the area or they are yet to master the subject matter. Nevertheless, rigorous reading and investigation extensively before going into research is the appropriate step to conquer this challenge.
- e. Delimitation in interrogating the inferences of literature and elevating the same to a currency: A researcher must pay attention to a variety of literature extant in a subject matter. The beauty of research work pushes the frontiers of knowledge and establishes the chasm in what is already known.
- f. Avoiding the temptation of plagiarism when the abundance of the body of literature fits into the current theme under study: A research topic that fits exactly into an already existing body of knowledge is problematic in many ways (Ogbonna et al., 2022, pp. 6-7).

## Conclusion

The paper has discussed multiple aspects of review of literature. What to write, why to write, how to write and how to tackle challenges have been elaborated in this article. Writing literature review is an indispensable writing for the researchers at universities who pursue their degrees in different disciplines. They need to gather materials and then write reviews of those for fitting into the dissertations. Indeed, literature review demonstrates the scholarship of the students and helps them to be capable of finding the research gap. The significance of literature review increases when the students are critically engaged in the pool of information on the topic of the study. This paper has mentioned two types of literature review: qualitative and quantitative. However, sometimes, the researcher can opt for the third i.e. mixed one. The literature review poses some challenges as well that the researchers can conquer provided that they become serious about the research work. The task of writing a literature review can become productive and engaging if the students know how to describe, summarize, evaluate and clarify the concepts of the materials. These materials can be journal articles, research reports, dissertations, and even newspaper articles. If the researchers can classify the themes explored in the materials, they can under the literature review efficiently and effectively. Overall, the literature review consists of three tasks: summarizing, evaluating and clarifying the current knowledge on the topic of the study. To increase the knowledge in the field of the study, the students must undertake the literature review rigorously.

## References

- Bruce, C. S. (1994). Research Student's Early Experiences of the Dissertation Literature Review. *Studies in Higher Education*, 19(2), pp. 217—229.
- Cooper, H. M. (1988). The Structure of Knowledge Synthesis. *Knowledge in Society*, 1, pp.

104—126.

- Denney, Andrew S. & Richard Tewksbury (2013). How to Write a Literature Review. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 24 (2), pp. 218—234.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2012.730617>
- Leite, Debora F.B. et al. (2019, September). Approaching Literature Review for Academic Purposes: The Literature Review Checklist. *Clinics*, pp. 1—8. DOI: 10.6061/clinics/2019/e1403
- Ogbonna, Oluchi Precious et al. (2022). Practical Guide to Writing Literature Review. *Humanus Discourse*, 2(4), pp. 1—9, <http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me>
- Serra, Fernando Antonio Ribeiro (2015, September). Constructing a Literature Review. *Iberoamerican Journal of Strategic Management*, 14(3), pp. 1—5.
- Sharma, S. (2007). Literature Review in Humanities and Social Sciences. *The Economic Journal of Nepal*, 30 (1), pp. 1—2.
- University of Leicester (2009). Doing a Literature Review. Learning Department, pp. 1—8, [www.le.ac.uk/succeedingyourstudies](http://www.le.ac.uk/succeedingyourstudies)