



## Literature Review and Academic Research

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### Abstract

Literature review is a compulsory component in a research process. The most significant factor is the researchers should understand 'the importance of proper literature review and how to perform the literature review'. Unfortunately, many researchers believe that the literature review means just go through the existing literature and summarize them to be included in the literature review chapter. The purpose of this paper is to describe the nature of literature review, to explain the importance of literature review, identify how to perform a proper literature review process in a research study and to discuss the concept of Cooper's Taxonomy of Literature Review.

**Indexed terms: Importance, Literature review, Perform, Purpose, Research Process,**

### I. Introduction

literature review can be identified as "the selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfill certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed" (Hart, 1998, p.13). Conducting a literature review has many purposes. As explained by Randolph (2009) "Conducting a literature review is a means of demonstrating an author's knowledge about a particular field of study, including vocabulary, theories, key variables and phenomena, and its methods and history" (p.2). A first review of the academic literature will help to narrow down the broad problem and to develop a clear and specific problem statement. A second review of the literature or critical literature review is essential in most research projects. In both inductive and deductive research, a review of the literature will help to develop a conceptual or theoretical background. In deductive research, a literature review will also help the researcher to develop a theoretical framework and hypotheses. In inductive research, it is not required to develop a theoretical framework. A review of the literature will thus help the researcher to get familiar with relevant knowledge related to the problem that aims to solve (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). In addition to that, Randolph (2009) has explained that literature review plays a role in; identifying the research problem, seeking new lines of inquiry, avoiding fruitless approaches, gaining methodological insights, identifying recommendations for

further research and seeking support for grounded theory. Further the author has quoted Hart (1998, p.27) as Hart contributes additional reasons for reviewing the literature, including; identifying what has been done and what needs to be done, finding out importance variables relevant to the topic, identifying new perspective, identifying relationship between ideas and practices, establishing the context of the topic or problem, rationalizing the significance of the problem, enhancing and acquiring the subject vocabulary, understand the structure of the subject, relating ideas and theory to applications, identifying the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used and placing the research in a historical context to show familiarity with state-of-the art development.

However, the exact purpose of a critical literature review depends on the research approach that is taken. In general, a literature review ensures that:

- The research effort is **positioned** relative to existing knowledge and builds on this knowledge.
- One does not run the risk of “**reinventing the wheel**”; that is wasting effort on trying to rediscover something that is already known.
- Conducting a literature review is essential for developing a research idea, to consolidate what is already known about a subject and to enable you to identify any knowledge gaps and how your research could contribute to further understanding (Winchester and Salji, 2016).
- The background is available to enable you to look at a problem from a specific angle, **to shape your thinking**.
- A clear idea emerges as to what variables will be important to consider, why they are considered important, and how they should be investigated to solve the problem.
- The researcher is able **to introduce relevant terminology** and to provide guiding definitions of the concepts in the theoretical framework.
- The researcher is able **to provide arguments** for the relationships between the variables in a conceptual model.
- Testability and replicability of the findings of the current research are enhanced.

(Sekaran and Bougie, 2016)

Writing a literature review requires a range of skills to gather, sort, evaluate and summarize peer-reviewed published data into a relevant and informative unbiased narrative. There are many sources like digital access to research papers, academic texts, review articles, reference databases and public data sets. A formal literature review is an evidence-based in depth analysis of a subject. Similarly a formal literature review is a critical appraisal of a subject and are not only an academic requirement but essential when planning a research project and for placing research findings into context (Randolph, 2007).

## II. Importance of Literature review

Conducting a literature review is essential for developing a research idea, to understand what is already known about a subject and to enable you to identify any **knowledge gaps** and how the research could contribute to further understanding (Winchester and Salji, 2016). Similarly, a comprehensive literature review helps, to identify a knowledge gap, to introduce a theoretical framework, to develop a conceptual framework, to discuss

the findings of the study. Furthermore, it can be explained the importance of literature review as, to develop a research idea, (to identify what is already known and identify a knowledge gap), to evaluate the research findings (support to identify other research findings that align or corroborates the findings and results that differ, enabling to position the research in the field, literature review is also important for obtaining findings to support research. Majority of literature reviews will focus on the findings of prior research, there are some situations where literature reviews need to focus on the methodology of prior research. When conducting a research study relevant theory/s need to be identified. Theory is a highly form of reasoning for why certain events occur. There are two directions that the theory section can take once an overview of why the theory pertains to the current research topic has been discussed. The second possible direction is to argue why a new theory should be used and the shortcomings of other theories (Boote & Beile, 2005).

### **The importance of literature review in grounded theory research**

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967, (Ciaran Dunne, 2011) first proposed grounded theory, a research methodology primarily associated with qualitative research. Grounded theory researchers are not focused on testing hypotheses taken from existing the theoretical frameworks, but rather develops a new ‘theory’ grounded in empirical data collected in the field. Within the field of grounded theory research, the use of existing literature represents a polemical and disruptive issue, which continues to spark debate.

*In their original publication, The Discovery of Grounded Theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) Explicitly advised against conducting a literature review in the substantive area of search at an early stage of the research process: ‘An effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study’ (1967, p.37) (Ciaran Dunne, 2011, p113).*

There are many issues to discuss under the topic of importance of literature review in grounded theory research. In nutshell, that can be pointed out as “it is not very clever to rediscover the wheel, and the student or researchers who is ignorant of the relevant literature is always in danger of doing the equivalent’ (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

### **III. How to conduct a literature review**

As explained by Randolgh (2009, P.4) the stages for conducting and reporting a literature review parallel the process for conducting a primary research. The first step of a literature review involves the identification of the various published and unpublished materials that are available on the topic of interest, and gaining access to these. The quality of a literature review depends on a careful selection and reading of books, academic and professional journals, reports, thesis, conference proceedings, unpublished manuscripts, etc. Academic books and journals are in general, the most useful sources of information. The sources of resources need to decide based on the nature and the objectives of the research project. Following are the some of the sources available for literature review.

### (1) Textbook

Textbooks are a useful source of theory in a specific area. An advantage of textbooks is that they can cover a broad range of topics. Moreover, textbooks can cover a topic much more thoroughly than articles can. A disadvantage of textbooks is they tend to be less up to date than journals.

### (2) Journals

Both academic and professional journals are important sources of up-to-date information. Articles in academic journals have generally been peer-reviewed: This means that articles have been subject to the scrutiny of experts in the same field before being accepted for publication. Research articles are very useful because they provide an overview of all the important research in a specific area.

#### Review articles

Summarize previous research findings to inform the reader of the state of existing research. (They may or may not contain a meta-analysis: a type of data analysis in which the results of several studies are combined and analyzed as if they were the results of one large study). Review articles are very useful they provide an overview of all the important researches in a specific area.

#### Research articles

Are reports of empirical research, describing one or a few related studies. The conceptual background section of a research article provides a compact overview of relevant literature. Research articles also provide a detailed description of the purpose of the study, the method(s) used, and results of the study.

### (3) Conference Proceedings

Conference proceedings can be useful in providing the latest research, or research that has not been published. These are very up to date and not every manuscript presented at a conference, publish in an academic journal; hence it is required critically assess the quality of this information source.

As listed by Berg (2009, P. 389) the relative value order of these sources can be presented as follows:

- (1) Scholarly empirical articles, dissertations, and books.
- (2) Scholarly, non-empirical articles and essays
- (3) Textbooks, encyclopedias, and dictionaries.
- (4) Trade journal articles.
- (5) Certain nationally and internationally recognized “good” newsmagazines.

## IV. Evaluating the literature

The quality of the literature review is mainly depends on the quality of the source. Hence, it is required to select carefully the relevant books and articles. A glance at **the title** of the articles or books will indicate which of them may be pertinent and which others are likely to be peripheral to the contemplated study. **The abstract** of an article usually provides an overview of the study purpose general research strategy, findings, and conclusions. An **article’s introduction** also provides an overview of the problem addressed by the research and specific research objectives. The **table of contents** and the **first chapter** of a book may help you to assess the relevance of the book. Similarly, a good literature review needs to include references to the key studies in the field. Articles and books that are often cited by others must be included in a good literature review, even

if these articles and books were written 30 or even 40 years ago. Work that is more recent should also should be incorporated in a good literature survey.

### **In order to assess the quality of a research article it is required to ask the following questions:**

1. Is the main research question or problem statement presented in a clear and analytical way?
2. Is the relevance of the research question made transparent?
3. Does this study build directly upon previous research?
4. Will the study make a contribution to the field?
5. Is there a theory that guides the research?
6. Is the theory described relevant and is it explained in an understandable, structured, and convincing manner?
7. Are the methods used in the study explained in a clear manner?
8. Is the choice of certain methods motivated in a convincing way (Justification of methods)?
9. Is the sample appropriate?
10. Are the research design and/or the questionnaire appropriate for this study?
11. Are the measures of the variable valid and reliable?
12. Has the author used the appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative techniques?
13. Do the conclusions result from the findings of the study?
14. Do the conclusions give a clear answer to the main research questions?
15. Has the author considered the limitations of the study?
16. Has the author presented the limitations in the article?

The **quality of the journal** that published an article can also be used as an indicator of the quality of an article.

Moreover, it is important to consider the following questions in this respect:

- 1. Is the journal **peer-reviewed** (that is, do all articles have to undergo a review process before they are published?)
- 2. What is the impact factor of the journal?

## **V. Documenting the literature review**

Documenting the literature review is important to convince the reader that, the researcher is knowledgeable about the problem area and has done the preliminary homework that is necessary to conduct the research and a theoretical framework (in deductive research) will be structured on work already done and will add to the solid foundation of existing knowledge.

### **Ethical Issues**

When incorporating others work into our research work, it is required to maintain appropriate ethical standers. Following are the some important aspects that we should pay attention relating to ethics.

1. **Purposely misrepresenting** the work of other authors- that is, their viewpoints, ideas, models, findings, conclusions, interpretations and so on.
2. **Plagiarism** – the use of another’s original words, arguments, or ideas as though they were your own even if this is done in good faith, out of carelessness, or out of ignorance.
  - **Plagiarism** is a type of fraud that is taken very seriously in the academic world, mainly because using the work of others as if it were your own does not convey much respect for the efforts that other people have put into their work.
  - There are many forms of plagiarism above and beyond copying and pasting text your own work.



**Table 01: Common forms of plagiarism**

Sources not cited	
01	<b>“The Ghost Writer”</b> The writer turns in another’s work, word-for-word, as his or her own.
02	<b>“The Photocopy”</b> The writer copies significant portions of text straight from a single source, without alteration.
03	<b>“The Potluck Paper”</b> The writer tries to disguise plagiarism by copying from several different sources, tweaking the sentences to make them fit together while retaining most of the original phrasing.
04	<b>“The Poor Disguise”</b> Although the writer has retained the essential content of the source, he or she has altered the paper’s appearance slightly by changing key words and phrases.
Sources cited (but still plagiarized)	
01	<b>“The Forgotten Footnote”</b> The writer mentions an author’s name for a source, but neglects to include specific information on the location of the material referenced. This often masks other forms of plagiarism by obscuring source locations.
02	<b>“The Misinformer”</b> The writer provides inaccurate information regarding the sources, making it impossible to find them.

(Developed based on Sekaran and Bougie, 2016)

## VI. Referencing

Acknowledging the sources of the literature review is a very serious and an essential part in the research process. A **bibliography** is a listing of work that is relevant to the main topic of research interest arranged in alphabetical order of the last names of the authors. A **reference list** is a subset of the bibliography, which includes details of all the citations used in the literature review and elsewhere in the paper, arranged, again, in alphabetical order of the last names of the authors. There are many modes of referencing are followed in business research. Eg: **APA Style** (American Psychological Association), **Harvard Style**. Main we can refer hard copies of the relevant sources or soft copies of the relevant source. It is mandatory to cite all these sources in the in-text references and end-text references.

## VII. Cooper’s Taxonomy of Literature Reviews

Cooper suggests that literature reviews can be classified according to five characteristics: focus, goal, perspective, coverage, organization, and audience (Randolph, 2009). As shown in table 2 the first characteristic is the focus of the review. Cooper (1988) identifies four potential types of focus: research outcomes, research methods, theories, and practices or applications. The second characteristic is Goal. A literature review has many goals. Cooper explains mainly two types of goals; Integration and Criticism (critically analyzing the literature). The third characteristic is perspective. The perspective taken depends largely on whether the review is conducted in the quantitative or qualitative traditions. The fourth characteristic is coverage. Cooper proposes four coverage scenarios. The fifth characteristic is organization. There are many formats in which to organize a review. Three of the most common are the historical format,

the conceptual format, and the methodological format. The final characteristic of Cooper's (1988) Taxonomy of Literature Reviews is audience. Eg: for a dissertation, the supervisor and reviewers of the dissertation are the primary audience. The scholars within the field that the dissertation relates to are the secondary audience (Randolph, 2009).

**Table 2: Cooper's Taxonomy of Literature Reviews**

Characteristic	Categories
Focus	Research outcomes Research methods Theories Practices or applications
Goal	Integration (a) Generalization (b) Conflict Resolution (c) Linguistic bridge-building Criticism Identification of central issues
Perspective	Neutral representation Espousal of position
Coverage	Exhaustive Exhaustive with selective citation Representative Central or pivotal
Organization	Historical Conceptual Methodological
Audience	Specialized Scholars General Scholars Practitioners or policymakers General public

Source: Randolph (2009). A guide to writing the dissertation literature review. *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*, Vol 14 (13)

## Conclusion

As explained above conducting a research is a very significant task. Mainly, this task can be performed in two ways called quantitatively or qualitatively. There are some researchers who prefer to follow both this aspects that category can be identified as mixed method. However, literature reviews vary depending on the type of research questions being investigated by a study. The most important factor is each of these mention categories of researches, the success is depend on a critical literature review process. Hence, in order to avoid the task of 'reinvention of wheel' every researchers should understand the importance of proper literature review. Thus, doing the literature review properly, and report the literature review results ethically and successfully, are very serious steps in the research process.

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