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## UNIT 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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Review of literature is a collective body of works done by earlier scientists and published in the form of books or in the form of articles in journals or published as monograph etc. Every scientific investigation starts with a Review of Literature. In fact, working with the literature is an essential part of the research process which help generate ideas, helps in developing significant questions and is regarded as instrumental in the process of research design. In this unit we will be dealing with the review of literature, how to go about it, what is its importance and how the review should be organised and how to relate it to the present research report.

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### 2.1 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the purposes of review of literature;
- explain the sources of review of literature in psychology;

- identify different types of literature;
- learn about the writing process; and
- describe the process of preparation of index card.

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## 2.2 PURPOSES OF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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A literature review is part of a report. It provides considerable information on the topic being researched and the various works that had gone on in the field over the years. These materials are gathered by the researcher from many sources such as journals, books, documents etc. The review of such a literature could be a matter of fact presentation of the information or it could be a synthesis of a large number of information and put together subject wise for the purpose of understanding. It can be just a simple summary of the sources, but it usually has an organisational pattern and combines both summary and synthesis. In summary all the information is synthesised and given in a capsule form. It synthesises and organises the entire information in terms of its relevance and appropriateness to the topic of research. It might give a new interpretation of old material or combine new with old interpretations. Or it might trace the intellectual progression of the field, including major debates. And depending on the situation, the literature review may evaluate the sources and advise the reader on the most pertinent and relevant information.

### **Difference between Literature review and Academic research report**

The question arises as to how the literature review differs from an academic research paper. While the main focus of an academic research paper is to develop a new argument, a research report will contain the literature review as one of its chapters. In a research report one uses the literature as a basic foundation and support for newer ideas and insights into the research topic of interest. Literature review on the other hand summarises and synthesises the many arguments and literature and research findings gathered from such a review and puts forward arguments in favour or against the particular topic and its findings.

### **Materials to be included in review of literature**

The next question is regarding how many and how much of materials to be included in review of literature. There is no hard and fast rule about this. The researcher has to definitely include the materials from classic and pioneering works in the area. In addition the researcher should also include all the relevant research works published more recently especially in the last 5 to 10 years.

As for the types of sources to be consulted for review of literature, this includes books, journal articles, monographs, documents, grey literature such as unpublished documents or research papers read at some conferences etc. In addition the internet is an important source from where articles and abstracts could be downloaded for this purpose.

Once all the materials have been gathered from different sources as mentioned above, the researcher should organise the same according to the year of publication and the subject matter must be organised to give meaning to the entire literature gathered keeping in view the present research topic of interest to the researcher.

The researcher can evaluate these materials on the basis of the methodology used, the research findings arrived etc. The researcher could also include in such a review certain minimal and directly relevant historical account regarding the research topic.

The specific purposes of a Review of the Literature are enumerated below:

- *Identifying variables relevant for research*

When the researcher makes a careful Review of the Literature, he becomes aware of the important and unimportant variables in the concerned area of research. A careful Review also helps the researcher in selecting the variables lying within the scope of his interest, in defining and operationalising as well as in identifying variables which are conceptually and practically important. Thus a Review of the Literature, on the whole, prepares the researcher to formulate a research problem in which conceptualisation and practically important variables are selected.

- *Avoidance of repetition*

A Review of the Literature helps the researcher in avoiding any duplication of work done earlier. A careful review always aims at interpreting prior studies and indicating their usefulness for the study to be undertaken. Thus prior studies serve as the foundation for present research. In some cases the duplication or replication of prior studies becomes essential. This is especially true when the researcher wants to test the validity of the earlier studies. In such a situation, too, a careful review helps the researcher in getting acquainted with the number and nature of the studies related to the present research whose validity is being assessed at present.

- *Synthesis of prior works*

Review of the Literature enables the researcher to collect and synthesise prior studies related to the present study. This, in turn, helps the researcher in building a better perspective for future research. A synthesised collection of prior studies also helps a researcher to identify the significant overlaps and the gaps among the prior works.

*Determining meaning and relationship among variables*

A careful Review of the Literature enables the researcher in discovering important variables relevant to the area of the present research. When significant variables are discovered, the relationship among them can be identified. Subsequently, the identified relationship is incorporated into different hypotheses. Thus, for conducting a scientific study, the relationship between the different variables must be explored by reviewing the literature so that a good context may be built up for subsequent investigations.

In addition to these specific purposes, there are some general purposes of the literature review:

- To argue for the relevance and the significance of the research question.
- To provide the context for one's own methodological approach
- To establish one's own credibility as a knowledgeable and capable researcher.
- To argue for the relevance and appropriateness of one's own approach.

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## **2.3 SOURCES OF THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

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There are diverse sources of the Review of the Literature. Some of them are enumerated below.

### **2.3.1 Journals and Books**

Different research journals and books relevant to the areas of interest are the primary sources of the Review of Literature. Most major libraries have a periodical section

where different types of research journals are made easily available. A research journal generally contains the publication of original research reports with their detailed methodology and results. Such journals contain original research reports with their detailed methodology and result. Such journals are referred and therefore are different from non-referred journals. A referred journal is one which reports only those articles which are carefully reviewed by the experts before publication. Often, the reviewer rejects several manuscripts and selects a few for publication. Similarly, books are also direct sources of the Review of Literature. Of these two, journals are regarded as more useful because they provide the researcher with the latest and up-to-date information relevant to the area of interest.

### **2.3.2 Reviews**

Reviews are short articles that give brief information regarding the work done in a particular area over a period of time. Reviews are commonly published in journals, yearbooks, handbooks and encyclopedias. Reviewers select research articles of their interest, organise them contentwise, criticise their findings and offer their own suggestions and conclusions. Review articles are a good source for those investigators who wish to have all the relevant researches at one place without taking pains to look for them. Since the reviewers organise all the possible research papers of the relevant area in their review articles, review articles also provide the advantage of prior reviews.

### **2.3.3 Abstracts**

Abstracts provide a summary of the research reports done in different fields. Psychological abstract (Washington: American Psychological Association), and Sociological abstract (New York: Sociological Abstracts, INC) are the two common examples of abstracts. These abstracts are the useful sources of up-to-date information for researchers. In an abstract, besides a summary, researchers get all the relevant information such as the title of the Research Report, name of the author and the journal pagination information, etc., regarding the research article. The only limitation of abstracts is that they fail to satisfy those researchers who desire detailed information regarding the methodology and results of the research articles.

### **2.3.4 Indexes**

Indexes show the titles of the research report without any abstract. The titles are categorised and arranged alphabetically in each category so that the researcher can locate any article of interest easily. The Education Index (New York: H W Wilson Co.) is a good example of an index. As indexes do not provide detailed information they keep many a researcher dissatisfied. They can be best regarded as the supplementary source which, if combined with other sources, can yield valuable information to the researchers.

### **2.3.5 Internet**

Today Internet is a very easy and quick source of Review of Literature. Internet sites are very useful for providing easy access to original writings by important researchers. They also provide such an updated information on the topic that ordinarily is not available in the library. Internet sites also provide for useful bibliographies related to a particular researcher. Search on Internet also reveals some relevant professional societies and academic associations which can provide a lot of support to the studies in the concerned area. Such organisations also sometimes publish important papers or periodicals which can be of immense help to the researchers. Some publishers put

the brief content and extracts from the recently published books on the Internet and these can be of valuable help to the researchers. Sometimes, the Internet sites include articles extracted from encyclopedias which can also be very useful and informative as background reading. However, they are not normally suitable for citing in a report.

### **2.3.6 Doctoral Dissertations**

Doctoral dissertations have also been a very good source of the Review of the Literature. In libraries of universities, doctoral dissertations are available. The researcher can choose the dissertations of their interest and find useful and relevant information there. There are no set forms for writing the research report in a doctoral dissertation but most dissertations contain chapters like an Introduction, Review of the Literature, Purpose of the Study, Method of the Study, Results, Discussion, Summary and Conclusion.

Some researchers prefer not to add a separate chapter on Discussion, Summary and Conclusion. Some do not add a separate chapter on the Review of the Literature but incorporate it into the Introduction itself. Thus the doctoral dissertations present the advantage of prior review. Ordinarily, it is not possible for the researcher to move through all the important libraries in the country to consult all existing doctoral dissertations. Hence, he/she can have access to those dissertations that interest him through Dissertation Abstracts International, which publishes the abstracts of the doctoral dissertations submitted to different universities. In India, the Survey of Research in Education (edited by M B Buch) does much the same function. The second Survey of Research in Education covering the period between 1972-78 has also been released. Recently, the listing of dissertation abstracts has been computerised through DATRIX in terms of the key words (usually words appearing in title of the dissertation).

### **2.3.7 Supervisors/Research Professors**

Supervisors often know the literature well and are able to guide in right direction. They are the recognised authority on the topic or research problems. Therefore, they should be consulted and their suggestions and advices should be carefully analysed. It may also be that the other research professors have recently sourced and reviewed the literature or an area very close to the literature the researcher is seeking. So they also constitute one important source.

Whatever may be the sources of reviews, the process of reviewing literature itself is not above criticisms. Inevitably, the interpretation of findings insights derived, the manner in which conclusions are drawn are all solely dependent upon the judgments of the reviewer. In other words, such reviews fall prey to what is called subjective judgment.

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## **2.4 TYPES OF LITERATURE**

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In order to work with appropriate literature it is essential that the researcher must be able to identify and find it. For this, he/she must have an understanding of various literature types. Some of the common types of literature are as under:

### **2.4.1 Subject-Specific Books**

Introductory and advanced text books and research report can provide important background and context for the research. Such literatures also provide information about theory and method of the research.

### 2.4.2 Grey Literature

Grey literature means both published and unpublished materials that somehow do not have International Standard Book Number (ISBN) or an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN).

Grey literature is a broad category that includes unpublished research newspaper articles, conference paper and pamphlets, etc. During the course of doing research most researchers do Utilise one or the other type of grey literature.

### 2.4.3 Official Publications, Archives and Statistics

This type of literature serves the dual purpose. Firstly such literature can be a valuable source of background and contextual information and secondly, they can also be used as a source of secondary data, Document analysis and secondary data analysis are often based upon this type of literature.

### 2.4.4 Writing Aids

As its name implies, such literature generally offer a significant support during the process of writing and can be easily used to improve the linguistic style of the work. Such literature include dictionaries, bibliographic works, encyclopedias, thesauruses, yearbooks, books of quotes, almanacs, etc.

### 2.4.5 Journal Articles

This type of literature is very common among the researches. Its popularity is due to several factors, First, journal articles are very credible. Second, they are often targeted for academic audience. Third, they possess the trait of specialty. Fourth, they possess the regularity of production which meant that research articles are not only relevant but also current.

#### Self Assessment Questions

1) What are the major objectives of Review of Literature?

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2) Enumerate the prominent sources of Review of Literature.

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3) What are the prerequisites for organising the Review of Literature?

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4) Carve out a befitting Review of Literature with the help of an example.

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5) Explain in your own words a few of the following words.

Review of Literature, Journals, Indexes, Internet, Doctoral Dissertations.

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## 2.5 WRITING PROCESS OF THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since the Review of Literature may be a very long chapter, it does need some form of structure. The simplest way of organising the research works is to discuss them in chronological order. But this may not prove to be appropriate in all situations. Another way is that one can group the works on different subjects together with the date of publication as the only criterion of order. But this may also be confusing. Still another way may be to base the structure on the different types of publications. For example, chapters from books, journal articles and single authored books should be separately grouped and structured. The basic aim of the Review of Literature is to use the literature for informing, establishing and arguing. In fact, the Review of Literature should go beyond the said report.

### Find a focus

A literature review not the sources themselves. This means that the researcher will not just list the sources but but selectively use them in the research topic area. These can be accommodated in terms of themes, or issues and bring those sources together, and present them. Some of the questions the researcher should ask self are the following:

- Do they present one or different solutions?
- Is there an aspect of the field that is missing?
- How well do they present the material ?
- Do they portray it according to an appropriate theory?
- Do they reveal a trend in the field?
- A raging debate?

One of the above themes should be picked up to focus the organisation of the review.

### **Construct a working thesis statement**

The thesis statement should argue for a particular perspective on the material. Some sample thesis statements for literature reviews are as follows:

*The current trend in treatment for congestive heart failure combines surgery and medicine.*

*More and more cultural studies scholars are accepting popular media as a subject worthy of academic consideration.*

### **Consider organisation**

Once the statement has been made, what is the most effective way of presenting the information? What are the most important topics, subtopics, etc., that the review needs to include? And in what order should they be presented? The researcher should develop an organisation for the review at both a global and local level:

### **Cover the basic categories**

Just like most academic papers, literature reviews also must contain at least three basic elements: an introduction or background information section; the body of the review containing the discussion of sources; and, finally, a conclusion and/or recommendations section to end the paper.

### **Organise the body of the report**

Once the basic categories are in place, then the researcher must consider how the sources should be presented within the body of the report.

To work out an overall organisational framework for the review, the following three typical ways of organising should be considered

- *Chronological Method*

If your review follows the chronological method, you could write about the materials above according to when they were published. For instance, first you would talk about the studies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then about the book published in the 1970's and then end up with articles about the topic in the recent years.

- *Method By publication*

If the order demonstrates a particular trend, then the researcher can arrange the reviews in the order of publication chronology. For instance, you could order a review of literature on the psychological aspects of suicides, if the progression revealed a change in suicidal practices over the years.

- *Method By trend*

Another way to organise the resources is to examine the sources under another trend such trends in couple suicide or suicidal pact etc. Under this method, the researcher would combine the recent studies on suicidal pacts, of a century ago with those that are available today.

### **Thematic reviews of literature**

Thematic reviews of literature are organised around a topic or issue, rather than the



progression of time. However, progression of time may still be an important factor in a thematic review. For instance, the suicidal review could focus on the development of the self esteem or disappointment in love affair leading to suicide. These studies could be organised chronologically. The only difference here between a “chronological” and a “thematic” approach is what is emphasised the most: the reason of injury to one’s self esteem leading top suicide.

### **A methodological approach**

This approach differs from the two above in that the focusing factor. Here the focus is on the method used by the researcher. For the suicidal issue, one methodological approach would be to look at cultural differences between the method of suicides. Or the review might focus on the economic impact of suicides. A methodological scope will influence either the types of documents in the review or the way in which these documents are discussed.

Once you’ve decided on the organisational method for the body of the review, the sections to be included should be easy to figure out. They should arise out of the organisational strategy. In other words, a chronological review would have subsections for each vital time period. A thematic review would have subtopics based upon factors that relate to the theme or issue.

Sometimes, though, one might need to add additional sections that are necessary for the study, and a few are given below:

*Current Situation:* Information necessary to understand the topic or focus of the literature review.

*History:* The chronological progression of the field, the literature, or an idea that is necessary to understand the literature review.

*Methods and/or Standards:* The criteria used to select the sources in the literature review or the way in which the researcher presents the information. For instance, one may explain that your review includes only peer-reviewed articles and journals.

*Questions for Further Research:* What questions about the field has the review sparked? How will the researcher use the review for further work in the area?

O’heary (2004) has recommended that for writing a good literature review, the following steps should strictly be followed:

- *Relevant reviews*

The researcher should give a look on the literature reviews done in several of the journal articles, From these reviews, good and relevant reviews should be sorted and this depends upon the research skills of the researchers. Supervisor should help him in selecting the relevant and good reviews.

- *Write critical annotations while going through the various reviews*

The researcher should sort and organise the annotations of the reviews by themes, issue of concern and common limitations, etc While doing so, some patterns would start emerging and this would, in turn, help in developing researcher’s own argument.

- *To develop a structure*

The researcher should structure the potential reviews according to the most urgent needs such as topical themes, arguments that the researcher wishes to establish, etc.

The structure so developed is always subject to modification with the emergence of new thinking.

- *To write purposefully*

The researcher should note that he can review the literature without any agenda but he cannot write a formal literature review without any definite agenda or aim. The reader must know the reasons why and what are you telling them.

- *Use the literature to support the argument*

The researcher should not use the review only for reporting or borrowing the arguments from others rather he should use the literature for generating ideas that may help or support his own arguments.

- *Make the literature review an ongoing process*

The researcher should make the literature review an ongoing process. In other words, the literature review should answer the researcher's question, theories and methods and these should help in setting the parameters of the literature review. Thus literature review becomes a cyclical process and should often have a moving target.

- *Get plenty of feedback*

The researcher should not wait upto the last minute of writing process. Whatever has been written should be passed over to supervisors and other experts for their feedback. Early feedback gives a chance for rethinking and modification of ideas being incorporated in the writing process.

- *Remain prepared for redrafting*

In view of the suggestions through feedback, the researcher should redraft the review in a coherent manner so that the argument is reasonably supported.

Thus, writing the literature review is a complex task which can be made easy by following the above mentioned steps meticulously.

### Self Assessment Questions

1) Discuss the strategies in writing a review.

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2) What are the steps to be followed in the writing processs of a review of literature?

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3) Why is feedback important in review of literature?

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4) Is redrafting necessary in review of literature? What advantage does it have?

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## 2.6 HOW OLD SHOULD THE LITERATURE BE?

One of the important questions for a researcher is: how old may the literature be? The simplest answer to this question is that it can be of any age. In fact, academic research is a cumulative activity. Each generation of researcher learns from the work of previous generation and current research basically depends upon the work and insights of the previous researchers. Since in any society the latest and contemporary research and publication are in great demand it is preferable to cite as many recent publications as possible.

Despite this, almost in any discipline, there are some seminal works which are centuries old but have become so significant that they are still being preferred by the researchers. Although their original ideas have been modified by the subsequent researchers over the years, their original spirit and views still remain significant and are held in considerable esteem. For example, the work of Sigmund Freud in the field of Psychoanalysis is of about 150 year back but his ideas, theories, viewpoints are so pertinent and of importance to any researcher of today, that working in this field is bound to have these included in the Review of the Literature.

However, it would be a healthy suggestion for researchers that they should always take precaution in citing older works unless they are confident and convinced in quoting them.

## 2.7 PREPARATION OF INDEX CARD FOR REVIEWING AND ABSTRACTING

After going through the different sources of the Review of the Literature, researchers prepare their own review and abstract on the index card. Usually, for the purpose, a 6" × 10" index card is recommended. In most journal articles, an abstract in about 150 words is provided. The researcher can incorporate it in the abstract being written. Where the article seems to be very important and relevant, the researcher can prepare a more detailed version. Usually, the abstract, thus prepared, is divided into three parts.

- i) The first part consists of the purpose and hypothesis of the study. The researcher should write down the purpose of the study in not more than two lines. If the

hypotheses are small. they can be recorded verbatim but if they are lengthy, they should be synthesised.

- ii) The second part consists of the methodology of the study in which size of the sample, nature of the population, methods for measuring or manipulation of the variables, methods of data collection, designs and statistics are shown in synthesised form.
- iii) The third part consists of the findings and conclusions. In this part, the researcher should briefly take down the findings relating to each hypothesis and also concisely the conclusion drawn by the author.

At the top of the index card, a full reference should be clearly written in exactly the same way in which it appears in the researcher's own reference list. There are different types of research formats but that which is followed by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association is widely popular and has been adopted by most of the important research journals. The researcher should never trust own memory for recall of the details of any research article and therefore, all the important and relevant details should be carefully noted down in the index card.

Thus the reviewing and abstracting of the literature on the index card, should be done carefully and systematically. Sometimes it has been reported that researchers trust their memory for recalling a particular detail. But this is not a healthy practice because they are apt to forget the details or their memory may be blurred after some time. Researchers should try their best to accommodate every important and relevant detail under the three common headings suggested above.

#### **Self Assessment Questions**

- 1) Is there any limitation to the period that one must go upto in reviewing literature?

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- 2) Why is the old literature important? Give examples.

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- 3) When we take materials from others work, how do we acknowledge the source? Give examples.

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## 2.8 LET US SUM UP

A literature review is part of a report. It provides considerable information on the topic being researched and the various works that had gone on in the field over the years. These materials are gathered by the researcher from many sources such as journals, books, documents etc. Literature review differs from an academic research paper in that the main focus of an academic research paper is to develop a new argument whereas a research report will contain the literature review as one of its chapters. To the issue of how many and how much of materials to be included in review of literature, there is no hard and fast rule about this. The researcher has to definitely include the materials from classic and pioneering works in the area. In addition the researcher should also include all the relevant research works published more recently especially in the last 5 to 10 years.

As for the types of sources to be consulted for review of literature, this includes books, journal articles, monographs, documents, grey literature such as unpublished documents or research papers read at some conferences etc. In addition the internet is an important source from where articles and abstracts could be downloaded for this purpose.

The specific purposes of a Review of the Literature are identifying variables relevant for research, avoidance of repetition, synthesis of prior works and determining meaning and relationship among variables.

There are diverse sources of the Review of the Literature, which includes, journals and books, reviews, abstracts, and indexes. Internet, doctoral dissertations are other sources. As for the types of literature available for write up, this includes, subject specific books, grey literature, official publications, writing aids and journal articles.

Since the Review of Literature may be a very long chapter, it does need some form of structure. The simplest way of organising the research works is to discuss them in chronological order. The researcher should not use the review only for reporting or borrowing the arguments from others rather he should use the literature for generating ideas that may help or support his own arguments.

Since in any society the latest and contemporary research and publication are in great demand it is preferable to cite as many recent publications as possible. In addition, there are some seminal works which are centuries old but have become so significant that they have to be included. As for preparing index cards the details were discussed. It may be added here that the reviewing and abstracting of the literature on the index card, should be done carefully and systematically.

## 2.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Why is review of literature important in a report?
- 2) What are the pre requisites of literature review? Provide examples
- 3) What are the various methods of writing the literature review
- 4) What steps do we follow when we go through the source of review?
- 5) Why are past work so important? Elucidate.

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## 2.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2009). American Psychological Association. Washington, DC.

Singh, AK. (2009). *Test Measurements and Research Methods in Behavioural Sciences* (5<sup>th</sup> edition). Bharti Bhawan Publishers & Distributors.