UNIT 5 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

5.0   INTRODUCTION

Review of Literature is an important component of research work. Whether you are working on your research paper, dissertation or thesis, literature review is an integral part of the research process. However, many a time it is not properly understood and carried out. Students/ research scholars often consider review as a collation of large body of information and statistics available on the subject.

The literature review has a specific purpose and role in research - it collates, classifies and summarises the major work undertaken in the research area. Review of Literature traces the existing scholarship available in a specific field, their focal areas, research approaches and methodologies used and major findings arrived at. Thus, it captures the essence of the studies in a specific area and links them with the present research work.

Review is concerned with secondary data and discusses published studies. It draws on the heritage of the past by synthesising the ideas and arguments made by other scholars. It captures major debates in a specific area and provides new interpretations to the existing available material. Thus it serves as a handy guide of intellectual progression in an area of study.

We shall discuss various aspects of Review of Literature in detail in this unit. We shall start with the need and importance of literature review in research work,

the process of selection and organisation of material collected and how to write a review.

5.1   LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading through this unit, you should be able to:

*   discuss the need and importance of Review of Literature in research;

*   describe the objectives of Review of Literature;

*   outline the steps in material selection and collection for literature review; and

*   describe the process of writing Review of Literature.

5.2   LITERATURE REVIEW: NEED AND IMPORTANCE

In Unit 4, subsection 1.3.2 while discussing the characteristics of research, we had discussed that scientific research is:

*   Objective: as it deals with facts;

*   Empirical: as it deals with the knowable and potentially measurable facts/ elements;

*   Predictive: as it relates the present to future and predicts behaviour;

*   Systematic and cumulative: the studies previously undertaken serve as building blocks; and

*   Public: as the results are shared with scientific community to build knowledge.

For the purpose of our discussion, let us focus on the last two points - scientific research is **cumulative** and **public.** Research, as you are aware, is a series of work undertaken by different scholars in an area of exploration. They have examined varied aspects of an issue over a period of time thus added a body of scholarship in a discipline and also shared their work with larger public. This sharing has been done through various means such as publications in research journals, books, theses and dissertations as well as presentations in seminars and conferences, and so on. Thus, a large body of research material already exists in a subject that needs to be accessed, examined and referred to. It is possible that the available material may not directly be related to the specific area which you wish to investigate. However, it may be similar in some respects or have linkages with your topic, hence merits a close examination or **'review'.** Thus review of literature enables you to examine the gamut of issues and available research involved in an area, create a broad picture and situate your own work within a larger framework.

As discussed in Unit 2, primary data and secondary data are used in research. Primary data collection involves first hand observation by researcher while secondary data is already available - possibly for reasons other than the purposes of your research. The Literature Review is concerned with secondary data in which major research findings of other scholars and researchers in specific as well as related areas are collated, classified and summarised.

5.2.1 Literature Review for Whom?

When you start working at the review section you need to ask the question, for whom I am writing the literature review? This will help you select appropriate material and pitch it at the proper level. The literature review is certainly not meant for a general audience - the audience/ readers of review of literature will be specialised in nature. For example, at the Masters level, they will be department faculty, dissertation supervisor, and academic councilors at the Regional Centres among others. Similarly, at the PhD level, they will be your supervisor /s, fellow researchers, Doctoral Research Committee (DRC) members and examiners. Scholars in other disciplines, media practitioners and even policy makers may also read your thesis. Thus, at each level, your work will be critically examined by a specialised audience emphasising the need for suitably pitching the content.

5.2.2 Focus of Review of Literature

One question often asked by researchers is that what type of information needs to be cited in Review of Literature and how is it different from the information given in the introductory chapters. To this question, it is suggested that while accessing material, you will come across a vast body of literature in your subject that will include general information, statistical data, opinions and observations of scholars, and research studies. All information may not be useful for your research work, and you will have to select relevant information with care.

You may include the theoretical content, statistical data etc. in your introductory chapters to develop and build a context for your study. Ideally, the focus of review of literature should be on research studies. Therefore, while undertaking library/ Internet research, you should give special attention to the studies undertaken in your area for inclusion in literature review section, apart from collecting background material.

You may also include studies in related fields to develop a broader perspective on a subject. For example, if you are investigating Health Communication for Polio - apart from polio, you may also collect studies undertaken on communication for sanitation, hygiene, nutrition, reproductive health and so on. This will enable you to examine the common patterns in other aspects of health, to provide a holistic view. However, if a good number of studies are available in your specific topic, you may limit the studies to polio, to keep the discussion focused.

5.3 OBJECTIVES OF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Berger (2000) the literature search does two things: 'first it offers a sense of context for your readers so that they can see how your research fits into the larger scheme of things. Second, it shows readers where you got your information and lets them assess how current it is and how reliable it might be'. Thus the information collected for literature review has to be relevant, current, and reliable.

In addition, the review also helps to:

- refine ideas and concepts
- sharpen research objectives and hypothesis

- select appropriate theoretical frameworks and research methods
- identify practical problems
- avoid duplication of work and generate ideas for future research.

5.3.1 Refine Ideas and Concepts

The review of literature helps in firming up your ideas and developing a sound grasp of your topic. When you venture into research, you have great interest in a specific subject but may not know much in depth about it. The rich resources expose you to the varied research areas/ problems undertaken and thus enable you to evaluate your concepts and approaches and in turn firm them up. According to Brennen (2013), "literature review should not only give readers an understanding of what research has been done in this area but also describe how the new research project fits into the broader field of study and why it is important to pursue the study".

5.3.2 Sharpen Research Objectives and Hypothesis

Designing proper objectives is a skill which needs to be developed by researchers. A study of available literature helps you to design and sharpen your objectives properly. Many a time, objectives are written in general and vague terms such as 'to know'; 'to find out', 'to understand' etc. which are not observable and measurable. A good research study outlines the research objectives in behavioural terms which are measurable and specific. Some examples of behavioural terms are given in the box below:

Behavioural Terms

Analyse	Examine	Explore	Explain	Identify
Illustrate	Outline	Define	Describe	Distinguish
Demonstrate	Differentiate			

Apart from refining your ideas and research objectives, the findings of other studies help you in formulating your hypothesis which is an important element of the research design. Hypothesis, as discussed in Unit 3, is a tentative proposition, the validity of which remains to be tested. A proper hypothesis ensures a more precise study, as it imposes boundaries and helps to control intervening variables and testing for statistical significance. The review of literature exposes you to different forms of writing hypothesis and enables you to write it in a clear and concise manner.

5.3.3 Select Appropriate Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

The review of literature helps in selection of appropriate theoretical framework and research methods. As discussed in previous units, theoretical framework links a study with the larger body of work undertaken in a specific area and thus helps to focus and guide your inquiry.

Similarly, you can learn from the strong points of previous research - the type of research approach used (qualitative; quantitative or mixed method), research methods, tools and techniques selected and so on. A critical assessment of the

research methodology adopted by other scholars will help you select suitable tools and techniques for your research objectives. However, care needs to be taken if you are making a major deviation, for example, if majority of the studies reviewed have adopted qualitative approach and you wish to use quantitative methods, you will have to give a proper justification for such a deviation.

Some studies may not use proper research framework or sample selection hence could be weak in design, treatment and analysis. There could be some contradictions and inconsistencies in the results which may not be valid and reliable. Thus reviewing a large body of literature will bring criticality and the learning acquired will enable you to modify and select appropriate research tools, and thus infuse rigour in your research design.

5.3.4 Identify Practical Problems

Many reports mention some practical problems faced by the researchers - these could be in terms of vast scope of the study (taking up too many objectives or research methods, large sample etc.) which they found difficult to achieve within the limitations of timeframe, efforts and resources. The problems could also relate to some field experiences which were avoidable. As a researcher you can learn from the mistakes of others and avoid the pitfalls in your own study. Thus literature review helps to delimit the scope of the study and economise your efforts.

5.3.5 Avoid Duplication of Work and Generate Ideas for Future Research

A critical review of existing materials helps to determine which types of research, objectives, themes and topics have been 'over emphasised, under emphasised and/ or neglected and what more can be done to make the material more comprehensive'. According to Priest (2010),' a review of literature helps clarify conceptual issues, identify fruitful theories and methods and rule out "dead ends" that appear to have been thoroughly investigated already, which is why it is first on the list of essential steps in the research process'. Many published research reports generally include suggestions for further research in an area which are helpful in generating ideas for future research.

Check Your Progress: 1

Note: 1)   Use the space below for your answers.

2)   Compare your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.

1)   What is the role of theoretical framework in a study?

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2)   Why research objectives should be written in behavioural terms?

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5.4 EVALUATION OF MATERIAL FOR REVIEW

The library is the first place to initiate the process of selection and collection of material and the available resources help you gain some familiarity with your field of research.

5.4.1 Selection of Material

Evaluation of material starts with the gate-keeping process itself. At the first level; credibility of the source needs to be ensured, for example, in the case of a journal, you need to find out whether it is peer-reviewed or not, the periodicity and regularity of publication etc. The authority of the writer, currency and accuracy of content etc. also need to be evaluated. An assessment of the definition of concepts used and the evidence provided also help in ensuring quality of the material selected.

During library as well as Internet research you will come across a variety of information from varied sources of superficial nature. However, the kind of information needed for your specific purpose needs to be ensured otherwise you will get saddled with a large body of material. While some amount of extra material is inevitable during collecting material for review, care needs to be taken to remain focused on the research topic. It is also possible that in your anxiety to include large amount of information the depth of information gets ignored. As a researcher you should ensure that the information selected is very specific and in-depth to make your review of literature chapter a meaningful exercise.

A key point to remember is that a source like Wikipedia is not acceptable as an academic source for research.

5.4.2 Collection of Material

Libraries mostly use a system of keywords in their indexes which should be used to identify the relevant material. Material can also be located by examining the citations in recent publications on your topic. Search engines are commonly used for identifying relevant literature but much of the material may not be reliable or relevant for your work. Newspaper articles also give latest data and statistics on some areas from time to time. Academic journals constitute the most reliable and credible sources for literature review followed by books and monographs. The following are some well-known peer-reviewed journals in mass communication:

Journals in Mass Communication

- Journal of Creative Communications, Sage Publication with MICA, Ahmedabad
- Vidura, Press Institute of India, Quarterly, Chennai
- Communicator/ Sanchar Madhyam, IIMC, Quarterly, New Delhi
- Media Asia, Journal of Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC), adopted by Taylor and Francis, Singapore
- The Asian Journal of Communication, Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information jointly with Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC), Singapore

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- Communication, Culture & Critique - International Communication Association (quarterly), Southern Illinois College of Mass Communication, USA

- Communication Research Trends (Quarterly), Communication Department, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, USA

- Journalism & Mass Communication (Quarterly), Sage Publication, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA

- Media, Culture & Society - Sage Publication (quarterly), University of Glasgow, UK

Since research process, especially academic research involves a prolonged period of study; it is advisable to keep records of the data accessed which should be done concurrently, lest you may forget. The downloaded material from online resources may be kept in separate folders in your computer with appropriate titles/ captions. Apart from ensuring reliability and credibility of online resources, you must note down the date of retrieval for the purpose of citation.

Relevant pages from books and journals may be photocopied and kept in separate file covers. There will, however, be occasions when you will have to take copious notes of the material available in an exclusive library not quipped with photo-copying facility. With the increased accessibility of smartphones fitted with cameras, researchers take pictures of relevant pages and convert them into .pdf files. However, some libraries/organizations/individuals may not allow you to take pictures without permission. Hence, it would be prudent to take prior permission of the concerned, in view of the ethical issues involved.

Whatever strategy is followed for material collection, you must ensure full bibliographic details of all the resources collected so that you do not lose out an important citation at the report writing stage due to misspelling of a foreign author's name or missing year of publication, and so on.

Yet another common query is that how many studies or citations are considered sufficient for a review. In this regard, there is no rule of thumb and it would entirely flow from your research topic, availability of the material as well as the level of study (Masters, MPhil, PhD). Priest (2010) argues, "you will keep seeing citations to literature that has already been examined as key academic sources on a specific question are usually limited in number and often refer to one another".

Once requisite material has been collected, it has to be thoroughly read, re-read, classified and arranged for writing.

Activity-1

Identify a topic of your choice for exploration. Select a research journal in media and communication and obtain the issues of past three years. Go through these issues and find out if similar or related topics were investigated by other researchers in the journal. List the studies identified.

Check Your Progress: 2

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.

1) What care will you take while selecting material for literature review?

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2) Why it is important for the researcher to keep a record of the material collected?

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5.5   WRITING REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Writing literature review is an important part of the research process. According to Priest (2010), "putting the existing literature together in summary form, showing how it relates to a new problem (or a new interpretation of an old one) and identifying gaps and opportunities in the existing research record is both demanding and creative".

There is no single way of writing review of literature as it can be written in different ways. Researchers generally begin with a discussion of their theoretical framework and literature review before they develop their research questions. However, according to Brennen (2013), "some qualitative researchers interact with previously published literature throughout their reports, forming an extended conversation with other researchers".

5.5.1 Organisation of the Material

Material collected can be organised in the following ways:

- Chronological
- Thematic
- Methodological
- Area-wise

Chronological: Writing a review of literature in chronological manner is one of the most common ways of documentation in which you start from the earliest published studies then gradually move on to the more recent ones. The emphasis here is on progression of work in a given area over a period of time. To take an example, if you are researching the topic Communication Strategies for HIV/ AIDS, you will identify studies ever since the epidemic emerged in mid 80s in different parts of the world and then move on to the recent ones. Such

chronological classification will be linear in nature and may not take into account varied emergent themes investigated by different scholars and thus may lack continuity in terms of themes.

Thematic: During material collection some themes, issues and concepts are likely to emerge frequently. These emergent themes will have to be refined and merged together for the purpose of analysis. To extend the previous example of Communication Strategies for HIV/AIDS; some emergent themes could be: health communication; HIV as a gender issue; role of mass media; role of alternate media, among others. Here the organisation of material is around a theme rather than progression over a period of time. However, even then, chronological development of these themes may be required to provide a flow and structuring of the content.

Methodological: The studies may also be organised in terms of theoretical frameworks, methods and materials used and key variables investigated. For example, you may organise the studies in terms of qualitative and quantitative research and mixed method approaches. This will enable you to assess their methodological strengths and weaknesses and reveal how research practices differ across groups, times and settings.

Area-wise: Material can also be classified in relation to the part of the world from where the studies emanate, for example, Communication Strategies for HIV/AIDS in Developing Countries; Developed Countries; Eastern Europe & CIS; and Studies in India. Such a categorisation can trace common emergent trends from a specific geo-political area for the purpose of analysis. Many developing countries are likely to share similar set of problems and concerns and discussing them in broad terms can reveal common patterns and findings.

From the above analysis you would have seen that the review of literature follows many patterns and approaches. You can also select one way say, theme-wise and then proceed to include studies in a chronological manner - starting from the early studies to the latest ones. Each theme should be given a sub-head and within that you may proceed chronologically. The bottom line is that there should be some rationale and justification for placing the studies under a broad head. A thread should run throughout the entire review so that the diverse studies are linked in some way to reveal emergent patterns and trends.

5.5.2 Writing the Reviews

Now that the material collected for literature review has been organised following a pattern, it is time for writing. Literature review, like any academic work is written in a formal style avoiding colloquial words and expressions. It has an introduction, a body and a summary. The introduction sets the context and guides the reader what to expect - the broad themes and areas identified for discussion. The body discusses the focus of each study, the methods and materials used, the major findings and recommendations while the summary provides a gist of your conclusions and the argument you wish to make. Let us discuss this in some detail.

Introduction: The Review of Literature in a thesis or dissertation generally comes after introduction and theoretical framework of the study (if discussed separately). At times, it is also made a part of the introductory chapters. Whatever approach

you take, the first few paragraphs should provide a gist to the reader what to expect in the review in a crisp and concise manner. A brief introduction introduces the central theme and establishes connections between various themes of the studies discussed in sections and sub-sections.

The Body: This part of the report summarises the findings of all the relevant research work that has already been undertaken. One of the common practices in writing review is to present a synthesis of the work undertaken by an author. This is generally done by selecting the most important point in each source, outlining the problem examined, describing the research methods and tools used. Towards the end, major research findings are summarised and suggestions for future research enunciated. It is possible that some studies may not provide all these details and as researchers, you will have to decide to include them in the review or not.

According to Berger (2000), 'Review of Literature in essence is a form of editing, in which quotations and sometimes summaries, phrases and synthesis of the material read from various scholars, authors and researchers are collected to produce an essay or article that makes its argument'. While writing you may use original sentences, phrases and expressions and some short quotations of the respective authors/ researchers for infusing individuality.

The review can be written either in the present tense or past tense but consistency should be maintained. Instead of 'the author says', verbs such as argues, examines, explores, claims, emphasises, observes, stresses, states etc. may be used. Some linking words such as, in addition, similarly, moreover, however, etc. may be used. To highlight a different point of view you may write - striking a different note, on the other hand, in a contrary view, nevertheless, etc.

Summary: After capturing the essence of the entire gamut of studies in a systematic manner, you have to summarise their major thrust areas and recommendations in two-three paragraphs. Thus you are summarising and synthesising within each source as well as throughout the review. Here, you also need to enumerate the strengths and limitations of the studies and the gaps revealed in them. The strengths of the studies could be in terms of choosing varied areas for exploration, rigour in the research design, use of multiple tools of data collection and refined statistical tools for data analysis, path-breaking findings, among others. The limitations of the study could be weak research design, inadequate sample size, lack of focus etc.

Ideally, your study should aim to fill some kind of gap traced during the review and the summary should 'make an argument'. Like any good piece of writing you should edit the content and revise and re-revise to firm up the section/ chapter on review.

5.5.3   Ethical issues

While writing a review, you also need to keep various ethical issues in mind. For example you should present the ideas of other scholars accurately and be respectful of others' opinions. You should give due credit and proper citations from wherever you source the material. Citation is an important 'intellectual tool' for the researchers. According to Bertrand & Hughes (2013),

- "It adds credibility to your research by providing evidence that you have consulted other sources.

- It enables you to share your research with other researchers. The citations of others have provided valuable sources of information to you, and your citations are part of a reciprocal system of information exchange.

- Correct and accurate citation ensures that you cannot be accused of plagiarism".

You should not give any slant to the findings of other researchers and edit the material to show your own work in a positive light. You should also adhere to the copyright law and not use more than 60 words at a stretch and put material in quotations and cite the source.

While reviewing, you may come across some works which may be very relevant for your study. However, you should not attempt to copy verbatim and pass off the data as your own as you will get into plagiarism charges. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged passing of someone else's words or ideas as your own without proper acknowledgment of your sources (Bertrand & Hughes, 2013). Now plagiarism has become an extremely serious matter and various anti plagiarism softwares are available in this regard. At the Indira Gandhi National Open University, it is mandatory to run each Ph.D. thesis submitted by a scholar through anti plagiarism software to address this menace.

Activity-2

Go through the studies identified in Activity-I closely. Analyse their major findings and trace the emergent trends.

Check Your Progress: 3

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.

1) Among different ways of classification of material which one will you select and why?

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2) List three points which you will keep in view while writing review of literature.

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5.6   LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we looked at various aspects of Review of Literature and tried to demystify the topic. We started with discussing that review of literature is a form of secondary research which reviews the available research studies in a given area/ topic. The major works are identified, classified and summarised to make an argument. It is not review of great literary texts on which personal opinion on the materials read has to be provided or summary of available bibliographical material and citation of various sources at one place.

We discussed that review helps in refining your ideas and concepts, firms up your objectives and hypotheses. It also helps in selecting appropriate theoretical framework, research methods, tools and techniques for your study. A critical review of existing materials helps to determine which type of research, objectives, themes and topics have been over emphasised, under emphasised and neglected and what more can be done to make research more comprehensive.

We described the process of material selection, collection and organisation and suggested that research studies for reviews may be classified chronologically, thematically and methodologically or in a combination of two.

The process of writing review of literature was discussed in detail. It is generally done by selecting the most important point in each source, outlining the problem examined, describing the research methods and tools used and summarising the major research findings and giving suggestions for future research. It was emphasised that through such analysis the literature review identifies some gap which your study aims to fill.

Towards the end, some ethical issues were briefly discussed that ideas of other scholars should be presented accurately with due credit and proper citations. It was stressed that to show your own work in a positive light, you should not give any slant to the findings of other researchers and edit the material indiscriminately.

It is hoped that the above analysis will help you in reviewing literature for your research. This will help you approach, classify and write the review using your own style and contribute to the scholarship in your discipline.

5.7   REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

Berger, Arther Asa (2000), Media and Communication Research Methods, Sage Publications, London, New Delhi

Brennen Bonnie S. (2013), Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies, Routledge, New York

Bertrand Ina & Peter Hughes (2005), Media Research Methods: Audiences, Institutions, Texts, Palgrave MacMillan, New York

Priest S. H (2010), Doing Media Research: An Introduction, Sage Publications, New Delhi

Wimmer R.D. & Joseph R. Dominick (2004), Mass media Research: An Introduction, 4th edition, California, Wadsworth Series in Mass Communication

5.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1) The theoretical framework guides and links a study with the larger body of work available in a specific area. It systematically and logically attempts to explain the phenomenon being studied.

2) The research objectives need to be stated clearly in behavioural terms so that they are observable and measurable. Some examples of behavioural terms are: define, describe, explain, state, compare, differentiate, identify, distinguish, summarise, illustrate, outline etc.

Check Your Progress 2

1) While selecting material for literature review, I shall keep the following points in mind:

a) The amount of information should be adequate for the study.

b) The level of information should be appropriate for academic work.

c) The information selected should be specific, in-depth and not cursory or superficial in nature.

2) It is useful to keep a record of the material collected as it may be needed at the time of writing research report for cross-checking as well as citations. The date on which the material is retrieved from website, the names of authors especially the foreign authors, places of publications etc. should be clearly recorded.

Check Your Progress 3

1) I will select a theme-wise classification of material which will include studies written in a chronological manner. I shall give each theme a sub-head and proceed chronologically - starting from early studies moving on to the more recent ones. This way, I shall provide some rationale and justification for placing the studies under a specific head.

2) While writing review of literature, I shall briefly introduce the subject and how the material has been classified and presented. Then I shall take up the studies and outline their major thrust areas, methodological approach followed, major findings and recommendations. Towards the end, I shall provide the summary of the various studies - outlining their strengths and limitations and how my work will try to bridge the gap traced in these studies.