

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

LECTURE 3

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FORMULATING A RESEARCH PROBLEM

- ❑ This operational step includes:
 - ❑ Reviewing the literature
 - ❑ Formulating a research problem
 - ❑ Identifying variables
 - ❑ Constructing hypotheses

REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

- ❑ One of the essential preliminary tasks when you undertake a research study is to go through the existing literature in order to acquaint yourself with the available body of knowledge in your area of interest.
- ❑ Reviewing the literature can be time consuming, frustrating, but it is also rewarding.
- ❑ The **literature** review is an integral part of the research process and makes a valuable contribution to almost every operational step.

- ❑ In initial stages of research it helps you to clarify your ideas, establish the theoretical roots of your study and develop your research methodology.
- ❑ Later in the process, the literature review serves to enhance and consolidate your knowledge base in your subject area and helps you to examine your findings.
- ❑ Since an important responsibility in research is to compare your findings with those of others, it is here that the literature review plays an extremely important role.

- ❑ During the write-up of your research article, it helps you to integrate your findings with the existing knowledge - that is, to either support or contradict earlier research.
- ❑ The higher the academic level of your research, the more important a thorough integration of your findings with existing literature becomes.

- ❑ In summary, reviewing literature has following functions:
 - ❑ It provides theoretical background to your study.
 - ❑ It helps you establish the links between what you are proposing to examine and what has already been studied.
 - ❑ It enables you to show how your findings have contributed to the existing body of knowledge in your profession.
 - ❑ It helps you to integrate your research findings into the existing body of knowledge.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

- ❑ This is the process of searching the existing literature relating to your research problem to develop theoretical and conceptual frameworks for your study and to integrate your research findings with what the literature says about them.
- ❑ It places your study in perspective to what others have investigated about the issues.
- ❑ In addition, the process helps you to improve your methodology.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

- ❑ The literature review can help in four ways:
 - ❑ Bring clarity and focus to your research problem
 - ❑ Improve your research methodology
 - ❑ Broaden your knowledge base in your research area
 - ❑ Contextualize your findings, that is, integrate your findings with the existing body of knowledge.

BRINGING CLARITY AND FOCUS TO YOUR RESEARCH PROBLEM

- ❑ When reviewing the literature you learn what aspects of your subject area have been examined by others, what they have found out about these aspects, what gaps they have identified and what suggestions they have made for further research.
- ❑ All these will help you gain a greater insight into your own research questions and provide you with clarity and focus which are central to a relevant and valid study.

- ❑ In addition, they will help you to focus your study on areas where there are gaps in existing body of knowledge, and where you can to the existing body of knowledge, thereby enhancing your study's relevance and importance.

IMPROVING YOUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- ❑ A literature review tells you if others have used procedures and methods similar to the ones that you are proposing, which procedures and methods have worked well for them and what problems they have faced with them.
- ❑ This will increase your confidence in the methodology you plan to use and will equip you to defend its use.

BROADENING YOUR KNOWLEDGE BASE IN YOUR RESEARCH AREA

- ❑ When you undertake a research project for a higher degree (e.g. Masters or PhD) you are expected to be an expert in your area of research.
- ❑ A thorough literature review helps you to fulfil this expectation.
- ❑ Another important reason for doing a literature review is that it helps you to understand how the findings of your study fit into the existing body of knowledge

CONTEXTUALIZING YOUR FINDINGS

- ❑ Obtaining answers to your research questions is comparatively easy: The difficult part is examining how your findings fit into the existing body of knowledge.
 - ❑ How do answers to your research questions compare with what others have found?
 - ❑ What contribution have you been able to make to the existing body of knowledge?
 - ❑ How are your findings different from those of others?

- ❑ Undertaking a literature review will enable you to compare your findings with those of others and answer these questions.
- ❑ It is important to place your findings in the context of what is already known in your field of enquiry; that is, to integrate what you have found out with the existing literature.

SUMMARY OF LITERATURE

- ❑ A summary of the literature is a description of the significant findings of each relevant piece of work that you have gone through as a part of your literature search.
- ❑ The summary basically entails listing, under each pertinent source, the major findings of relevance to your study.

- ❑ Different studies in which the same theme is identified are referenced in one place where the theme is being discussed as a part of the literature review.
- ❑ A summary of the literature is a summary of the main findings from each relevant reference you searched.
- ❑ In a literature review you describe each theme that emerged during the literature search, citing its origin, comparing it with others and integrating it in a logical manner with the rest.

HOW TO REVIEW THE LITERATURE

- ❑ If you do not have a specific research problem, you should review the literature in your broad area of interest with aim of gradually narrowing it down to what you want to find out about.
- ❑ To start with, these ideas are very broad and vague but as you get more insight into research problem you narrow and refine them to select something that you are really interested in.
- ❑ Once you have reasonably narrowed your research problem, the literature review should then be focused around your research problem.

HOW TO REVIEW THE LITERATURE

- ❑ Your literature search should concentrate around the main themes of your research problem and should be undertaken as if you are answering the following questions:
 - ❑ What is already known in the area?
 - ❑ What is not known or what are the gaps in the existing body of knowledge?
 - ❑ What questions have remained unanswered?
 - ❑ Are there any areas of professional conflict?
 - ❑ What theories have been put forward relevant to your area of research?
 - ❑ What suggestions have been made for further research?
 - ❑ What research strategies have been employed by others undertaking similar research?

- ❑ There are four steps involved in conducting a literature review:
 - ❑ Searching for the existing literature in your area of study.
 - ❑ Reviewing the selected literature.
 - ❑ Developing a theoretical framework.
 - ❑ Developing a conceptual framework.

SEARCHING FOR THE EXISTING LITERATURE

- ❑ There are four sources that you can use to prepare a bibliography:
 - ❑ Books;
 - ❑ Journals;
 - ❑ Conference papers;
 - ❑ The Internet.

BOOKS

- ❑ The main advantage is that the material published in books is usually important and of good quality, and the findings are integrated with other research to form a coherent body of knowledge.
- ❑ The main disadvantage is that the material is not completely up to date, as a year or more may pass between the completion of a work and its publication in the form of a book.

- ❑ When you have selected 10-15 books that you think are appropriate for your topic, examine the bibliography of each one.
- ❑ Go through these bibliographies carefully to identify the books common to several of them.
- ❑ If a book has been referenced by a number of authors, you should include it in your reading list.

JOURNALS

- ❑ Journals provide you with the most up-to-date information, even though there is often a gap of 2-3 years between the completion of a research project and its publication in a journal.

CONFERENCE PAPERS

- ❑ Another important source for the literature review is the papers presented at professional conferences.
- ❑ These can provide you with the most recent research in the area.

THE INTERNET

- ❑ The Search Engines
- ❑ However, the most commonly used for your purpose are *Google*, *scholar.google.com*.
- ❑ There can be some other very useful source on the Internet, particularly to describe and explain terms and concepts (e.g. *Wikipedia*).
- ❑ You can use it for definitions, meanings and other details, though do bear in mind that you may not be able to quote from Wikipedia in your academic dissertations as many universities consider it to be unreliable.

REVIEWING THE SELECTED LITERATURE

- ❑ The next step is to start reading selected Books and Articles critically to pull together themes and issues that are of relevance to your study.
- ❑ Note whether knowledge relevant to your theoretical framework has been confirmed beyond doubt.
- ❑ Note theories put forward, the criticisms of these and their basis, methodologies adopted
- ❑ Determine the areas in which little or nothing is known - the gaps that exist in the body of knowledge.

DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- ❑ Examining the literature can be a never-ending task, but as you have limited time it is important to set parameters by reviewing the literature in relation to some main themes pertinent to your research topic.
- ❑ This brings us to the paradox mentioned previously: until you go through the literature you cannot develop a theoretical framework, and until you have developed a theoretical framework you cannot effectively review the literature.

DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- ❑ The conceptual framework is the basis of research problem.
- ❑ It stems from the theoretical framework and usually focuses on the section(s) which become the basis of your study.
- ❑ Whereas the theoretical framework consists of the theories or issues in which your study is embedded, the conceptual framework describes the aspects you selected from the theoretical framework to become the basis of enquiry.

WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE REVIEW

- ❑ Some people write up the entire literature review in one section, entitled “Review of the literature”, “Summary of literature” or “The literature review”, without subheadings.
- ❑ The authors strongly suggest to write literature review under subheadings based upon the main themes that have been discovered and which form the basis of theoretical framework.
- ❑ The second broad function of the literature review - contextualizing the findings of your study - requires you to compare very systematically your findings with those made by others.
- ❑ This function is undertaken, as mentioned earlier, when writing about your findings; that is, after analysis of your data.

SUMMARY

- ❑ Reviewing the literature is continuous process. It begins before a research problem is finalized and continues until report is finished.
- ❑ The literature review brings clarity and focus to research problem, improves the research methodology and broadens knowledge base.
- ❑ A literature review identifies the main themes from the literature reviewed that are of relevance to the study, whereas a summary of the literature describes the main findings from a reference reviewed without thematic integration and linkage.

- ❑ Reviewing the literature involves a number of steps:
 - ❑ searching for existing literature in area of study;
 - ❑ reviewing the literature selected;
 - ❑ using it to develop a theoretical framework from which study emerges and also to develop a conceptual framework which will become the basis of investigation.
- ❑ The main sources for identifying literature are books, journals, conference papers and the Internet.

- ❑ The literature review serves two important functions:
 - ❑ It provides a theoretical background to your study
 - ❑ It helps you to contextualize your findings by comparing them with what others have found out in relation to the area of enquiry.
- ❑ The sequence of themes in the write-up should follow a logical progression; various arguments should be substantiated with specific quotations and citations from the literature, adhering to an acceptable academic referencing style.