

The Purpose of a Literature Review

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Abstract

This article presents a detailed examination of the benefits, challenges, and purpose of conducting a doctoral-level literature review. The article analyzes both the cognitive neurolinguistic processing challenges attending the assimilation and synthesis of large volumes of new information and the metacognitive knowledge strategies needed to overcome them. Finally, the article concludes with a topic section identifying the purpose of a doctoral-level literature review.

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Benefits of Conducting Literature Reviews

According to Walter and Stouck (2020), one purpose of a literature review is to aid the doctoral aspirant in the development of their professional, scholarly, doctoral identity. Walter and Stouck cites a complementary study by Wisker (2015) which correlates writing literature reviews with doctoral students' metacognitive skill sets, especially including the development of the necessary endurance and aptitude needed to be successful in a doctoral program 2020. Among the most necessary skills is to attain the ability to conduct what the anthropologist Turnbull calls deep reading in his book *The Forest People* (Turnbull, 1987).

Challenges of Literature Reviews

The literature review is a daunting process because the doctoral student encounters vast, unwieldy quantities of data, often riddled with obscure, arcane, or incomprehensibly polysyllabic words and verbiage (Walter & Stouck, 2020). The first task is merely to comprehend the words the student is reading which is *nontrivial* from a neurological perspective. Indeed, the results of an EEG-based empirical study by Kimppa, Shtyrov, Hut, Hedlund, Leminen, and Leminen (2018) revealed that adult learners experience much longer processing times when acquiring new vocabulary.

The Kimppa et al. study also revealed this initial lexical or new word acquisition occurs in the slow-to-store but fast-to-lose *declarative* memory center rather than the more automatic and long-term *procedural* memory center of the human brain (2018). This is to say that students must first master the vocabulary of their literature before they may properly review it. Luckily, pedagogical and andragogical research have afforded doctoral learners some useful tools to aid in this titantic endeavor. In the next section resolutions to these challenges are presented. Once the student is equipped with the intellectual tools presented below they may proceed to conduct their literature reviews.

Purpose of Literature Reviews

Once students master critical textual analysis of several texts, they must deploy a schema for organizing the synthesizing that vast quantity of information using a tool such as the thematic matrix which Robinson (2021) refers to as structured tabular thematic analysis or ST-TU *before* they are prepared to write a literature review which includes both an annotated bibliography and, among other sections, a topic statement and problem statement. Once key themes which recur among all the scholarly research articles included in the ST-TU, a student must employ one or more metacognitive knowledge strategies (MKS) (MKSs in order to synthesize their main ideas, and integrate them into an emergent, coalescence which may be further sublimated into a thesis, topic, or problem statement (Wisker, 2015).

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Glossary

literature review (*n.*) a comprehensive summary of previous research on a topic. 2

structured tabular thematic analysis (*n.*) a table whose column headers are the titles or authors of the articles included in the literature review and whose rows list the key themes from each article. 3

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