

Literature Review

Introduction

In terms of a literature review, "the literature" means the works you consulted in order to understand and investigate your research problem. Re-view (or look again) is a process of systematic, meticulous, and critical summary of the published literature in your field of research. How others have dealt with topics in your research subject and of what knowledge they have acquired?

The following are some definitions which explain the meaning, purposes and functions of literature review:

F. Cardesco and E.M. Gatner (1986): "A literature review is a self-contained unit in a study which analyzes critically a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification, and comparison of prior research studies and theoretical articles."

P. Haywood and E.C. Wragg (1996): "A literature review is the process of locating, obtaining, reading and evaluating the research literature in the area of your interest."

N. Walliman (2010): "A literature review (or overview) is a summary and analysis of current knowledge about a particular topic or area of enquiry."

Review of literature is, thus, an essential part of all research studies. It is a way to discover what other research in the area of your problem has uncovered. A critical review of the literature helps you to develop a thorough understanding and insight into previous research works that relates to your study. It is also a way to avoid investigating problems that have already been definitely answered.

Example: A social scientist is interested to study the impact of social mobilization program on poverty alleviation. From his or her knowledge and experience in the field, he or she knows that a body of knowledge exists about the methods and policies of social mobilization, but he or she also knows that the boundaries of this body of knowledge are constantly expanding. Other social scientists have worked in the same area and have, no doubt, contributed new information to the field. Therefore, he or she seeks to identify these new contributions and add them to the established body of knowledge before he or she conducts his or her own investigation.

Purpose of Literature Review

Scientific research must be based on past knowledge. The previous studies cannot be ignored because they provide the foundation to the present study and provide you with a handy guide to a particular topic. The primary purposes of literature review are: to learn how others have defined and measured key concepts; to identify data sources that other researchers have used; to identify potential relationships between concepts; and to identify researchable hypotheses. The literature review enables you to know:

- What research has been done in the subject?
- What others have written about the topic?
- What theories have been advanced?
- What approaches were taken by other researchers?
- What were the areas of agreement or disagreement?
- Whether there are gaps that can fill through the proposed research?

The purpose of literature review is, thus, to find out what research studies have been conducted in your chosen field of study, and what remains to be done. No matter what topic you choose, chances are that someone has already done research on it. If so, then conducting your research as originally planned would be a waste of time and resource. The purposes of literature survey are as follows:

- To give continuity in research.
- To place the research in a historical context to show familiarity with state-of-the-art developments.
- To synthesize and gain new perspective, get more insight into the topic and know about the knowledge status of the proposed subject.
- To draw a theoretical framework and define the research parameters.
- To discover important variables relevant to the topic.
- To generate hypotheses.
- To identify the methodology and techniques of research.

The literature survey provides the foundation for developing a comprehensive theoretical framework from which hypothesis can be developed for testing.. Another advantage of reviewing the literature applies to the design phase of your project. Designing a study involves several decisions as to what variables to include and how to measure them, what techniques to use, what procedures to follow, and so on. A literature review provides you with a rich source for addressing these important design questions.

Need of literature review:

- It demonstrates that you know the field. This means more than reporting what you have read and understood. Instead, you need to read it critically and to write in such a way that shows you have a feel for the area; you know what the most important issues are and their relevance to your work; you know the controversies and things that are neglected.
- It justifies the reason for research. This is closely connected with demonstrating that you know the field. It is the knowledge of your field which allows you to identify the gap which your research could fill.
- It allows you to establish your theoretical framework and methodological focus. Even if you are proposing a new theory or a new method, you are doing so in relation to what has been done.

Types of Literature Review

There are different types of literature review that can be undertaken, depending on the purpose of the research. The main kinds of literature review are as follows:

- **Historical review:** This type of literature review traces the issues, concepts or events over time.
- **Methodological review:** This kind of review assesses and evaluates methodological techniques used and the strengths of different studies.
- **Theoretical review:** This type of review focuses on the theories or concepts related to the research issue under study.
- **Integrative review:** This type of review summarizes and integrates the current state of knowledge on the topic under study.

These kinds of literature reviews are not mutually exclusive. These are often mixed together. In the case of academic research, all these types of literature review need to be undertaken.

Functions of Literature Review

The review of literature accomplishes the following functions:

- Ensures that you are not "reinventing the wheel".
- Gives credit to those who have laid the groundwork for your research.
- Demonstrates your knowledge of the research problem.
- Demonstrates your understanding of the theoretical and research issues related to your research.
- Shows your ability to critically evaluate relevant literature information.
- Indicates your ability to integrate and synthesize the existing literature.
- Convinces your readers that your proposed research will make a significant and substantial contribution to the literature.

Encyclopedias

■ ***Encyclopedia Britannica:*** It is an excellent introduction to almost any field. It includes features and relatively long articles, which may be relied upon for authenticity and scholarly quality. The original British version of the encyclopedia is sometimes reflected in the fuller treatment given certain English topics. If an American orientation is desired, the Encyclopedia Americana should be consulted. Both these encyclopedias offer extensive bibliographies.

■ ***Britannica Online:*** This is an online version of Encyclopedia Britannica. Now with the online version, the task of locating materials, events and bibliographies has become much quicker and simpler.

■ ***Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences:*** It is the first comprehensive encyclopedia covering all fields of social sciences. Though it is international in scope, its emphasis is on English-speaking and Western European nations. It includes signed articles by specialists with adequate bibliographies. This encyclopedia is a good source for biographical articles.

■ ***International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences:*** International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences is not meant to replace the earlier Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. Instead, they should be used together with the International Encyclopedia emphasizing recent developments and an analytic comparative approach to a subject (e.g. "Comparative Politics"). Once again, articles are written by specialists and contain up-to-date bibliographies.

■ ***Encyclopedia of Education:*** Authoritative articles are included covering the history and theory of education, structure of education, structure of educational systems in various countries, research in education, important people and educational institutions, etc. This encyclopedia should be used in conjunction with the detailed index (Vol. 10). Its orientation is based primarily on education in the US; however, a number of articles treat international or comparative topics.

• ***McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology:*** Clearly written articles, intelligible to the non-specialist, treat the basic subject matter of natural sciences, including their major technological applications in engineering, agriculture, forestry, etc. Articles are profusely illustrated and have short bibliographies.

■ ***Business Encyclopedia and Legal Adviser.*** This encyclopedia includes articles written by professionals in accounting, banking, journalism, commerce and industry and explains the concepts significant to business, including the legalities involved.

■ ***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. 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.

Difference between Reference and Bibliography

While writing an assignment, article or book, the writer often looks for the sources to generate an idea or data. In this context, students usually misinterpret bibliography for reference, but they are different, in the sense that you give **reference** to the sources, that you have quoted in-text, in the research report or assignment. But on the other hand, in the **bibliography**, you create a list of all the sources you have gone through to conceive the idea.

Reference Vs Bibliography Comparison Chart

BASIS FOR COMPARISON	REFERENCE	BIBLIOGRAPHY
Meaning	Reference implies the list of sources, that has been referred in the research work.	Bibliography is about listing out all the materials which has been consulted during the research work.
Based on	Primary Sources	Both Primary and Secondary Sources
Arrangement	Alphabetically and numerically	Numerically
Includes	Only in-text citations, that have been used in the assignment or project.	Both in-text citations and other sources, that are used to generate the idea.
Supporting argument	A reference can be used to support an argument.	A bibliography cannot be used to support an argument.
Used for	Thesis and Dissertation	Journal Papers and Research work

Definition of Reference

Reference can be understood as the act of giving credit to or mentioning the name of, someone or something. In research methodology, it denotes the items which you have reviewed and referred to, in the text, in your research work. It is nothing but a way to acknowledge or indirectly showing gratitude, towards the sources from where the information is gathered.

Definition of Bibliography

At the end of the research report, bibliography is added, which contains a list of books, magazines, journals, websites or other publications which are in some way relevant to the topic under study, that has been consulted by the researcher during the research. In finer terms, it comprises of all the references cited in the form of footnotes and other important works that the author has studied.

Key Differences Between Reference and Bibliography

The difference between reference and bibliography can be drawn clearly on the following grounds:

1. Reference implies referring to someone or something, that means it provides the list of sources, whose text is used in the assignment or research work. Conversely, bibliography represents the list of all the sources, from which the research has gained some information about the topic, irrespective of the work cited or not.
2. References are based on primary sources, whereas bibliography is created on the basis of primary and secondary sources.
3. References used in the assignment can be arranged alphabetically or numerically. On the contrary, list of sources used in the bibliography is arranged numerically.
4. The bibliography is used to list out everything you go through to obtain the information relating to the assignment, no matter if you specifically cite it in your assignment or not. Now coming to references, it only takes into account those sources which have been cited in the assignment.
5. The main objective of adding a reference at the end of the document is to improve credence or support an idea or argument. As against, the bibliography is not used for supporting an argument.
6. While reference is used in thesis and dissertation. On the other hand, bibliography is used in case of journal paper and research work.