

What is a literature review?

A literature review is a comprehensive summary of previous research on a topic. The literature review surveys scholarly articles, books, and other sources relevant to a particular area of research. The review should enumerate, describe, summarize, objectively evaluate and clarify the previous researches. It should give a theoretical base for the research and help you (the author) determine the nature of your research. The Literature Review acknowledges the work of previous researchers.

OR

A literature review discusses and analyses published information in a particular subject area.

A literature review is more than a summary of the sources; it has an organizational pattern that combines both summary and synthesis. A summary is a recap of the important information of the source, but a synthesis is a re-organization, or a reshuffling, of that information. It might give a new interpretation of old material or combine new with old interpretations. And depending on the situation, the literature review may evaluate the sources and advise the reader on the most pertinent or relevant.

The purpose/ Function of a Literature Review

1. It brings clarity and focus to research problem
2. It improves understanding of the research problem
3. It also improves research methodology
4. It places each work in the context of its contribution to understanding the research problem being studied.
5. It describes the relationship of each work to the others works which are under consideration.
6. It identifies new ways to interpret prior research.
7. It reveals any gaps that exist in the literature.
8. It resolves conflicts amongst different previous studies.
9. It points the way in fulfilling a need for additional research.
10. It locates your own research within the context of existing literature.
11. It **surveys** the literature in your chosen area of study
12. It **synthesizes** the information in that literature into a summary
13. It **presents** the literature in an organized way



Types of Literature Review

There are many types of literature review. The choice of a specific type depends on your research approach and design. The following types of literature review are the most popular in business studies:

Narrative literature review: It is also called traditional literature review. It critiques literature and summarizes the body of a literature. Narrative review also draws conclusions about the topic and identifies gaps in a body of knowledge. You need to have a focused research question to conduct a narrative literature review

Systematic Literature Review: A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) identifies, selects and critically appraises research in order to answer a clearly formulated question.

A Systematic Literature Review is a type of review that collects multiple research studies and summarizes them to answer a research question using rigorous methods.

Systematic literature review can be divided into two categories:

- a. **Meta-Analysis**
- b. **Meta-Synthesis.**

In Meta-Analysis findings from several studies on the same subject/issue are drawn and analyzed them using standardized statistical procedures. In meta-analysis patterns and relationships are detected and conclusions are drawn. Meta-analysis is associated with deductive research approach. A Meta-Analysis is a way of testing a hypothesis

Meta-synthesis is based on non-statistical techniques. This technique integrates, evaluates and interprets findings of multiple qualitative research studies. Meta-synthesis literature review is associated with inductive research approach. A Meta-Synthesis is a way of developing a new theory.

Scoping Literature Review: It is used to identify the scope or coverage of a body of literature on a given topic. It has been noted that "scoping reviews are useful for examining emerging evidence when it is still unclear. Scoping Literature Review is conducted to explore more general research question.



Argumentative Literature Review: It examines literature selectively in order to support or refute an argument, an assumption, or philosophical problem already established in the literature.

Integrative Literature Review: It critiques, and synthesizes secondary data about research topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated.

Theoretical Literature Review focuses on a pool of theory that has accumulated related to an issue, concept, theory, phenomena. Theoretical literature reviews play an instrumental role in establishing what are the theories that already exist, the relationships between them, to what degree these existing theories have been investigated, and to develop new hypotheses to be tested.

Importance/ Advantages of Literature Review

Literature review also enables us to do the following.

1-Literature review helps to identify the research methodology to adopt:

Most times, the unskilled researcher meets a problem in the process of adopting a research methodology. But during the course of literature review, the researcher sees previous studies done in that particular area and also sees the design and methodology the researchers adopted and why they got the specific results. This will then guide him in his selection of the appropriate research method.

2-Literature review increases the researcher's knowledge base: Most times, novice researchers enter into an area where they do not understand. However, literature review helps them have a good grasp of what the area is all about. Hence it gives them deeper insight and broadens their horizon and equips them with the skill and knowledge base needed to proceed on the research.

3-Literature review enables researchers to discover gaps to be filled in literature: This is one of the major functions of the review of literature. The knowledge gap refers to areas, which have been unexplored, unresearched, or uncharted in or avoided by researcher in previous researches. In the process of literature review, the researcher discovers missing links in research and tries to fill them.

5-Literature review enables the researcher take every view into consideration in embarking on the research: Literature review also assists the researcher in looking at the research from all the sides and not having a one sided view of the research area. It gives the researcher a panoramic view of an area. It simply means that during the process of literature review, the researches done within that particular area are examined. It gives the reader the impression that the researcher knows what he is doing.

6-Literature review sheds more light on the theories surrounding a particular research area: There are theories that are in journals and have never been published in textbooks. There are some theories that have never become prominent, but they have been formulated by experts at different times. Literature Review helps the researcher to have a good knowledge of these theories.

7-Literature review enables - the researcher in the choice of 'research topic: Literature review enables a researcher choose a topic for research and modify the one that may have been chosen.



8-Literature review enables the researcher decides on whether to continue with the research or not:

Literature Review helps the researcher to know what research has been done and what has not been done. The researcher decides whether to continue with the research work or leave the topic if it has been done better elsewhere.

9-Literature review enlarges the information, ideas and concepts relevant to the research: Literature review enables the researcher to extend the knowledge base of the study. Literature review makes a particular research rich in information and broadens the scope of the study.

10. Literature Review helps to identify the theoretical framework for the research. It helps to clarify the framework for the study and shows how the research is linked to existing theory.

11. Literature Review helps clarify research questions. One of the main functions of the literature review is to help researchers formulate clear and concise research questions. By reading about a topic, researchers can develop well-defined questions that can be addressed through their research.

12. Literature Review helps assess the quality of previous research. A literature review allows researchers to assess the quality of previous research on the topic. It enables them to judge the strengths and weaknesses of the previous studies and to decide whether they should build upon or replace them.

13. Literature Review helps comparing different studies. A literature review helps researchers to compare and contrast existing research on a particular topic to draw better conclusions from it.

14. Literature Review helps to identify problems. One of the main benefits of the literature review is that it helps researchers to identify problems, issues, or controversies in the existing body of knowledge on their topic.

15. Literature Review enables researchers save time. A well-done literature review can help researchers to save time by identifying relevant studies. It also allows them to focus on the most important issues and avoid unnecessary effort.

16. Literature Review helps in development of new research methods. The process of reviewing the existing literature can help researchers to develop new research methods and to improve upon existing ones.

17. Literature Review helps in realizing importance of validity and reliability. The process of literature review makes readers more aware of the importance of validity and reliability. It shows how these two characteristics can influence research results and thus help them to make informed decisions about whether or not to include specific studies in their work.

18. Literature Review helps to develop understanding about a new topic. Another benefit of the literature review is that it helps researchers explore complex topics. By reading about these topics, they can develop an understanding of what research has been conducted on the topic and how it has been conducted.

Primary Sources

Literature review mostly relies on primary sources. A primary source is written by a person who developed the theory or conducted the research. Examples include *original works of fiction, art, or music; letters; diaries; interviews; or even works of criticism.*

Secondary Sources

Secondary source research documents are description of studies prepared by someone other than original researcher. Secondary sources are written by a person who developed the theory or conducted the research.

Examples are Textbooks, edited works, books and articles that interpret or review research works, histories, biographies, literary criticism and interpretation, reviews of law and legislation, political analyses and commentaries.

Akinade and Owolabi (2009: 64) noted the following as some of the sources for literature on a research problem:

- Books
- Periodicals and Journals
- Projects, dissertations and thesis
- Indexes and Abstracts
- Encyclopedia
- Internet

1-Books: The importance of books lies in the fact that most theories used in theoretical reviews are found in books. This simply means that books contain an interpretation from the book author's point of view, studies done in a particular area.

Moreover, books are written in simple everyday language, which most people are conversant with. However, it is also important for the researcher to make use of firsthand sources of information like journals and periodicals.

2-Periodicals and Journals: Periodicals are collections of articles. These can be newspapers, magazines or journals. Periodicals are published within periods such as weekly, monthly or bi-monthly and so forth. Periodicals are a rich source of information. For instance, newspapers constantly have new reports, magazines have brief authoritative and concise articles and Journals are scholarly references that contain research outcomes by experts in journal's area of focus.

3-Projects, Dissertations and Thesis: Previous researches done by students in various levels – B.Sc., M.Sc. and Ph.D. are other rich sources of information for researchers. However, it is important to note that some of these sources are replete with methodological errors which should be avoided. Hence, students are advised to examine these works critically before using them.

4-Indexes and Abstracts: The researcher can also examine abstracts and indexes as sources of

information for literature review. Indexes are compilations of titles of research articles published in several journals within a period. The index contains author's name, paper title, year of publication, journal title and page number while an abstract is a collection of summaries of research articles, conference proceedings, theses, and so forth. It contains the summary of the research background, research problems, research methodology, findings, conclusions and recommendations, the researcher's name and affiliations, publication type, page numbers and so forth.

The above information can be obtained from libraries. These libraries could be public or private libraries. In addition, government ministries could be a major source for obtaining information. For instance, the Ministry of Information has a research and statistics department where all the information that has to do with any form of communication.

Characteristics of a good Literature Review

1. A good review of literature must be comprehensible.
2. I should include accurate references.
3. References should be collected from reliable and valid resources.
4. It should be systematic.
5. It should be reproducible.
6. It should be free from bias.
7. It should be well written
8. It should be in sum of its all parts.
9. It should be clearly searched and selected.
10. Accurate and valid references should be given in the review.

How to Write Literature Review

Literature Review Format/ Content

Introduction

- Provide an overview of the topic, theme, or issue.
- Identify your specific area of focus.
- Describe your methodology and rationale. How did you decide which sources to include and which to exclude? Why? How is your review organized?



- Briefly discuss the overall trends in the published scholarship in this area.
- Establish **your** reason for writing the review.

Body

- Find the best organizational method for your review.
- Summarize sources by providing the most relevant information.
- Respectfully and objectively critique and evaluate the studies.
- Use direct quotations sparingly and only if appropriate.

Conclusion

- Summarize the major findings of the sources that you reviewed, remembering to keep the focus on your topic.
- Evaluate the current state of scholarship in this area (ex. flaws or gaps in the research, inconsistencies in findings)
- Identify any areas for further research.
- Conclude by making a connection between your topic and some larger area of study such as the discipline.

