

Lecture Notes

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Along with selecting a research approach, the researcher also needs to review the literature related to the topic of interest. The literature review is an important part of crafting a research proposal. It helps determine whether the topic is worthy of further study and provides the scope of the project. Chapter two begins with a discussion about selecting a topic and continues with how a researcher determines whether the topic can and should be researched. Finally the actual process of reviewing the literature is outlined along with key differences found in the literature reviews of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods studies.

In beginning a research study, the researcher must first identify a topic to study and consider whether it is a practical and useful topic to explore. By exploring the previous research on the topic, the researcher becomes aware of what has already been done and what is needed. Chapter two explains how being able to answer the question “How does this project contribute to the literature?” helps to determine whether the project is worthwhile. The researcher must consider whether there will be access to participants and resources and whether the research will be of interest to others. A review of the literature serves many purposes including presenting the results of similar studies, providing a framework for comparing results with previous research and to determine how the current research contributes to the body of knowledge on the topic.

The Research Topic

- Identifying the Topic
 - Draft a brief working title
 - Pose the topic as a brief question
- Can the topic be researched?
 - Participants
 - Resources
- Should the Topic be Researched
 - Does it add to the knowledge base?
 - Is anyone interested in the topic?
 - Researcher's interests and goals

The Literature Review

- Shares results of other studies
- Relates a study to the ongoing dialogue in the literature
- Provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study

The Use of the Literature

Literature reviews in thesis or dissertation proposals provide a summary of the major studies and demonstrates that the writer is aware of the literature on the topic. In a journal article, the literature review tends to be briefer than that found in the thesis or dissertation.

- Can take several forms
 - Literature reviews that integrate what others have done and said
 - Literature reviews that criticize previous works
 - Literature reviews that build bridges between related topics
 - Literature reviews that identify the central issues in the field
- Literature reviews in qualitative research
 - In theoretically oriented studies, literature on cultural concepts or critical theories is used to frame the study. May be included in the introduction or placed separately.
 - May be placed towards the end of the paper when used to compare and contrast with the results of the current study.
- Literature reviews in quantitative research
 - Literature at the beginning to provide direction for the research question and hypothesis
 - Used to introduce a problem or describe the existing literature.
 - Literature located at the end when the author wants to revisit the literature to make comparison between results of existing research and current results.
- Literature reviews in mixed methods studies
 - Use either a qualitative or quantitative approach to the literature review.
 - Sequential approach - depending on whether the study starts with a qualitative or quantitative phase
 - Concurrent approach- the researcher decides to weight both quantitative and qualitative data equally.

Design Techniques

Steps in Conducting a Literature Review

- Identify key words
- Search catalog for journals and books
 - Initial focus on journals
 - Search computerized databases such as EBSCO, PsycINFO, ProQuest
 - Initially try to find about 50 research articles related to the topic
 - Determine whether books or journals are available in your library
 - Interlibrary loan
 - Bookstores
 - Skim the initial group of articles and obtain copies of those central to your topic
 - Start designing a literature map (visual picture of groupings of literature on the topic)
 - Begin to draft summaries including precise references
 - Assemble the literature review
 - Structure thematically
 - Organize by important concepts
 - Close by summarizing major themes, suggesting how your study adds to the knowledge and addresses gaps.

Searching Computerized Databases

- Available in academic libraries and through the internet
- Use free online databases (such as Google Scholar) as well as those available through the libraries (ProQuest, PsycINFO, EBSCO, etc.)
- Find an article close to the topic of interest and use the search terms used to describe it to find more articles.

A Priority for Selecting Literature Material

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- Start with a broad synthesis of the literature (reviews)
- Next use journal articles especially those reporting research studies
- Next look at books related to the topic
- Recent conference materials
- Dissertations – search dissertation abstracts
- The web – be sure to screen carefully for quality

A Literature Map for the Research

A visual summary of the research that has been conducted by others (usually in the form of a figure).

- Structure
 - Hierarchical structure with the proposed study on the bottom
 - Flow chart
- Principles of good map design
 - Topic placed at the top of the hierarchy
 - Organize studies found in literature search into broad categories
 - Describe the nature of these studies
 - Provide references to major citations
 - Major topics should lead to subtopics
 - Include quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods studies in the map

Abstracting Studies

An abstract is a brief review of the literature that summarizes the major elements

- Abstracts in quantitative research
 - Include the problem being addressed
 - State the central purpose or focus of the study
 - Briefly state information about the sample, population or participants
 - Review key results
- Abstracts in studies advancing typologies
 - Include the problem being addressed
 - Identify the central theme
 - State the major conclusions
 - If review is methodological, state flaws in reasoning and logic

Style Manuals

Style manuals provide guidelines for creating a style of manuscript by providing consistent format.

- American Psychological Association
- Chicago Manual of Style
- Give guidance on writing in-text and end of text references, headings, footnotes, tables and figures

The Definition of Terms

- Define terms that individuals outside the field of study may not understand
 - Define a term when it first appears
 - Write definitions at a specific operational or applied level
 - Use accepted language as found in the research literature to define terms
- Qualitative studies
 - May advance tentative definition at the beginning
 - Themes may emerge through data analysis
- Quantitative studies
 - Extensive definitions early
 - Comprehensively define all relevant terms
- Mixed methods
 - If study starts with a quantitative phase, definitions may be included in a separate section
 - If it begins with a qualitative phase then terms may emerge during research

A Quantitative or Mixed Methods Literature Review

- The review should contain sections related to major independent variables and dependent variables
- Introduce the review by discussing the organization of the review
- Review Topic 1 – independent variables
- Review Topic 2 – literature on dependent variables
- Review Topic 3 – literature that relates the independent variables to the dependent variables
- Provide a summary that highlights the most important studies, major themes and advances how the proposed study will fill the need for more research on the topic