

LITERATURE REVIEW:

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, daunting and 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. It has value even before the first step; that is, when you are merely thinking about a research question that you may want to find answers to through your research journey. In the initial stages of research it helps you to establish the theoretical roots of your study, clarify your ideas and develop your research methodology. Later in the process, the literature review serves to enhance and consolidate your own knowledge base and helps you to integrate your findings with the existing body of knowledge. 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 report it helps you to integrate your findings with 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, a literature review has the following functions:
- It provides a 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.

In relation to your own study, the literature review can help in four ways. It can:

1. bring clarity and focus to your research problem;
2. improve your research methodology;
3. broaden your knowledge base in your research area; and
4. contextualise your findings.

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 the aim of gradually narrowing it down to what you want to find out about. After that the literature review should be focused around your research problem. There is a danger in reviewing the literature without having a reasonably specific idea of what you want to study.

It can condition your thinking about your study and the methodology you might use, resulting in a less innovative choice of research problem and methodology than otherwise would have been the case. Hence, you should try broadly to conceptualise your research problem before undertaking your major literature review.

There are four steps involved in conducting a literature review:

1. Searching for the existing literature in your area of study.
2. Reviewing the selected literature.
3. Developing a theoretical framework.
4. Developing a conceptual framework.

The skills required for these tasks are different. Developing theoretical and conceptual frameworks is more difficult than the other tasks. Searching for the existing literature To search effectively for the literature in your field of enquiry, it is imperative that you have at least some idea of the broad subject area and of the problem you wish to investigate, in order to set parameters for your search. Next, compile a bibliography for this broad area.

There are three sources that you can use to prepare a bibliography:

- (a) books;
- (b) journals;
- (c) the Internet.