

LITERATURE REVIEW IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

by **Tran Quoc Thao**, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ho Chi Minh City Open University
Email: thao.tq@ou.edu.vn

Abstract:

Writing an effective literature review requires advanced research caliber for intensive and extensive synthesis of prior research on a particular research area. Within this paper, the forms and steps of conducting literature reviews are presented.

Keywords: *academic research, literature review, reflection*

1. Introduction

A literature review is an important part of academic research (e.g., research articles, theses, dissertations) (Lim et al., 2022). Additionally, it can serve as a synthesis of current research, establish a theoretical framework, evaluate the relevant literature, and identify gaps in existing research (Harris, 2019). Furthermore, it can serve as the theoretical framework for designing research instruments (e.g., questionnaire, interview, observation, test) (Duong, 2023). Therefore, writing a good literature review requires intensive and extensive work as it lays a foundation for research and helps to position it within the academic conversation.

2. Forms of Literature Review

The literature review can be in different forms, so selecting the right form of a literature review depends on its aims, methods, and delimitations (Harris, 2019); hence, researchers should think about the form of a literature review before starting to write.

Narrative Literature Review: This form is deemed to be the most traditional. It offers a holistic understanding of a research area and synthesizes the existing literature in a narrative form. It summarizes the key research themes and trends which can be utilized for developing research questions. This form can be subjective and biased although it is flexible and can be adapted to particular research needs (Hart, 2018), and it is commonly used in a field and with a brief example.

Scoping Review: This form aims to present the current knowledge on a given topic (Haddaway, et al. 2015). It is similar to a systematic review, but it does not aim to evaluate the quality of the summarized studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008).

Systematic Literature Review: With a vigorous and transparent approach, this form aims to seek and summarize all related research on a particular research topic. It has clear research methods, criteria for choosing studies, and assessment for the chosen studies; hence, it

can avoid subjectivity and bias. Moreover, this type is considered a form of primary research, and it can provide a thorough summary of the existing knowledge within a particular research field (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). This form is considered to be more reliable than the other forms since it has clearly defined research methods.

Apart from those types, other forms are meta-analysis (a review using statistical techniques to analyse data from multiple quantitative studies), integrative review (a review analysing both quantitative and qualitative studies to provide a comprehensive view on a particular topic), and theoretical review (a review examining, comparing, and analysing the existing theories of conceptual frameworks of a research topic). They serve different functions within the literature review process.

3. Steps for Conducting Literature Reviews

Writing a successful literature review consists of various steps as follows:

Defining the Scope and Purpose of the Literature Review

Initially, the scope and purpose of the literature review should be clearly identified. The questions can be asked: *What should the research questions or problems be addressed? What are the main concepts and themes relevant to the research topic?* Hence, a clearly defined scope can lead to the suitable and effective selection of existing research (Denney & Tewksbury, 2012).

Searching and Choosing Sources

It is useful to use the keywords to identify the sources in different academic databases,

libraries, and reputable resources to search relevant work. However, evaluating the credibility and authority of sources should be necessary (Welch et al., 2021). Usually, the sources of the 'big names' in the research areas should be prioritized since their theories and claims are highly influential. Currently, many AI-powered tools (e.g., Litmaps, Semantic Scholar, Elicit, Scite) can be supportive in searching the relevant sources.

Reviewing and Scrutinizing the Literature

Systematically reviewing the selected sources critically can provide a preliminary understanding for analyzing the existing research for the patterns, themes, and gaps. It is essential to examine and analyze different sources in relation to the research purpose (Denney & Tewksbury, 2012).

Structuring the Literature Review

The literature review should be structured logically and coherently. It can be organized in chronological order or themes (Taylor, n.d.). Moreover, the headings and sub-headings should be added to the literature review to make it logical and coherent.

Drafting the Literature Review

Drafting and refining a literature review can be time-consuming. Reviewing the literature should go beyond the mere summaries of the existing literature, and it should discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the literature and relate them to the research focus (Taylor, n.d.). Additionally, writing the literature should also point out the controversies, debates, and gaps in the literature.

The literature review can be written, revised, and edited several times; therefore, it is essential to review the literature carefully for clarity, coherence, accuracy, and completeness (University of Guelph, 2014).

4. Conclusion

Writing a good literature review is a skill which requires various aspects (e.g., critical analysis, synthesis, coherence, cohesion, and engaging style). Therefore, writing a literature review is time-consuming but worthwhile for demonstrating research caliber.

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Associate Professor Dr. Tran Quoc Thao is currently working at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ho Chi Minh City Open University. He has been teaching English for 20 years, and he is experienced in teaching English to both local and international students. His research areas are discourse analysis, English language skills, teacher professional development and instructional design model.