

From Search to Synthesis: Enhancing Literature Reviews with AI Tools in TESOL Research

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Abstract:

The article presents a general yet structured overview of the browsing-to-composing literature reviews process. It emphasizes the roles of digital search engines in effectively utilizing AI aids to gather information from relevant literature. Highlighting the use of newer technologies, the article cautions researchers in TESOL of the traps and blind spots of using AI. Careful authentication of resources adds an essential layer to conducting a literature review.

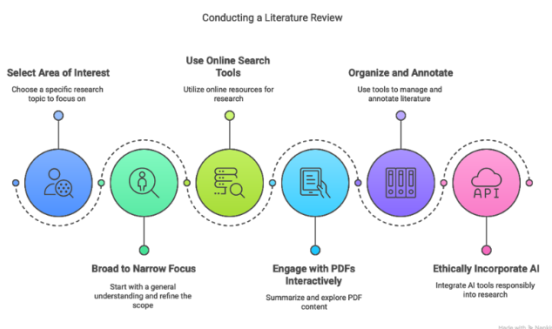
A literature review constitutes a fundamental research component, identifying existing knowledge and gaps in previous studies (Winchester & Salji, 2016). This procedure not only assists in pinpointing areas necessitating further exploration but also serves as a pivotal starting point for students and seasoned researchers. Given its complexity, the latter group acknowledges the meticulous consideration this step demands. A frequently posed question arises: How should we start this process?

The first step in research consistently involves choosing an area of interest, which guides focus and lays the groundwork for a thorough literature review. A literature review should progress from a broad to a narrow focus. Begin by acquiring a general understanding of your topic. For example, if your focus pertains to the utilization of AI in English learning in Vietnam, initiate with a

broader examination of the subject. Should the information prove scant, progressively refine your scope—first exploring AI in language learning, subsequently delving specifically into English language education, and finally narrowing it to the context of Vietnam. This systematic methodology ensures a comprehensive review that includes all pertinent dimensions and subtopics.

As technology and AI continue to advance, so has the methodology for conducting literature reviews. Online searches, from Google to the Scopus and Web of Science databases, have supplanted traditional physical libraries and led researchers down the rabbit hole of reference lists from popular articles in their field (Chong & Plonsky, 2021). At the same time, sophisticated generative AI tools have emerged (Shi & Aryadoust, 2024), including

platforms such as Elicit and Scispace, alongside well-known chatbots like ChatGPT, Deepseek, and Gemini. However, caution is paramount when employing these resources, as there exists a risk of encountering false references and unverified publications within AI-generated content. It is essential to verify these references for accuracy.



Another innovative feature of contemporary search engines is the ability to engage with PDFs interactively, allowing users to summarize and explore the content. Such tools facilitate an engaging approach to interrogating the material. Note-taking and annotating literature have become markedly simpler; while earlier programs like Zotero and EndNote permitted the addition of notes to articles, current tools assist in maintaining organization, annotation, and coherence. This enhances the immersive experience with your sources, empowering you to question and redefine your comprehension of them. I encourage the TESOL community and researchers to

ethically incorporate AI into their research methodologies, particularly to enhance their search strategies, organization, and composition of literature reviews, thereby maximizing the knowledge acquired.

References

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