

Mastering the Search for Research Gaps from Curiosity to Contribution

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Abstract:

Recognizing research gaps is one of the biggest challenges for inexperienced researchers, and using effective approaches like literature mapping, and the SQRRR can help to reveal uninvestigated areas. By facilitating the study of research challenges, methodology, and findings across a broad range of studies, these approaches assist researchers in discovering previously unexplored possibilities. Inconsistencies or inaccuracies regarding subjects, settings, demographics, techniques, and constraints might be found by thorough analysis. The Literature Map and SQRRR support both comprehension and retention and guide researchers in sharpening their focus to contribute to the existing literature.

One of the greatest challenges for novice researchers is recognizing what is missing and how it can contribute to the previous literature. Looking back at my thesis seven years ago, I didn't know where to start. Guided by my passion, I followed my curiosity into the field that truly captured my interest. To identify research gaps, the first steps involve critically reading and assessing relevant studies, which supports researchers in choosing high-quality sources for their literature review. To separate vital factors of a quantitative research study, even though it is a journal article, conference paper, or thesis, you should identify and critique the following elements:

- *Research problem*
- *Research questions or hypotheses*
- *Data collection procedure*

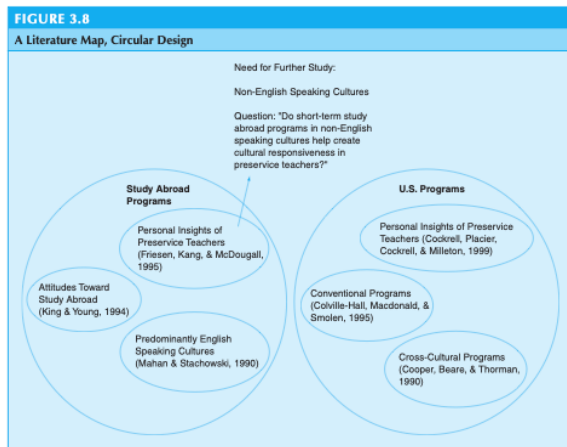
- *Results of the study*

(Creswell, 2011, p.93)

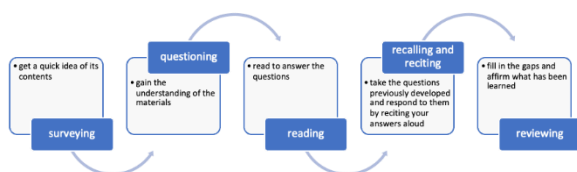
Regarding a qualitative research study, you might focus on:

- *Research problem*
- *Research questions*
- *Data collection procedure*
- *Findings*

(Creswell, 2011, p.94)



By digging into these elements, you can find out what the previous studies investigated and what might not have been revealed. Once you have gathered a broad range of literature, the next step is to construct a *Literature Map* (Creswell, 2011, p.95). This visual representation allows you to identify overlapping information and key themes within the literature, helping clarify how your proposed study contributes to or expands upon existing research rather than replicating it. I fortunately identified a significant gap: many studies did not sufficiently measure various characteristics of a word, as revealed by discrepancies between their research objectives and actual findings, thanks to my Literature Map.



SQRRR, stands for *survey, question, read, recite, and review*, another useful strategy proposed by Machi and McEvoy (2022),

serves as an effective framework for enhancing reading comprehension, retention, and deducing research gaps. Initially, you survey the material to obtain a general overview of its content and aims, and then formulate pertinent questions guiding the reading process and deepening understanding. While reading, you seek answers and identify key points. Until the reading is complete, the following step is to engage in recall through recitation, whereby you try to answer the previously posed questions without using the text again. The final stage involves a comprehensive review of the material to consolidate understanding and address any other gaps.

If searching for a strong research gap makes you feel doubtful or overwhelmed, you can defer it for later consideration and switch to analyzing topics, contexts, populations, methods, and limitations. From my perspective, exploring topics that have been over-studied but lack a thorough investigation can offer a meaningful exploration route. For example, if your interest is the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in listening, you might consider conducting a study on how AI can be applied to enhance listening skills in an in-depth way. Next, introducing a new participant group or exploring a different research context is another great idea for you to fill the previous gaps. In fact, the other two gaps I pinpointed were related to the participant group and the research setting, which emerged after analyzing variations in samples and research sites across previous studies. Another critical source for identifying gaps is the methodology section, and the gaps are so-called methodological gaps

(Montesor, n.d.), where prior studies relied solely on quantitative methods without incorporating qualitative methods. Last but not least, authors usually reveal their studies' limitations in the limitations sections, which often highlight areas where further investigation is needed (Galvan, J. L., & Galvan, M. C., 2017), thus guiding researchers in formulating their own studies.

In brief, to successfully explore the outstanding gaps, you can draw a literature map or use the SQRRR strategy to gather necessary information. Then, you can focus on spotting gaps related to over-researched topics, specific contexts, populations, methodologies, and acknowledged limitations.

Reference

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Montesor, A. (n.d.). *Types of Research Gaps*. Philscholar. <https://philscholar.com/types-of-research-gaps/>



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