

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ITS STAGES

**Dr. Vijay K. Bile**

Associate professor and HOD,  
Department of Commerce and Management,  
Yashwantrao Chavan Mahavidyalaya, Karmala,  
Dist. Solapur

### Introduction

The literature search is a very significant step in the research process. Research is carried out in order to inform people with new knowledge or discovery. However, it is not to be expected that everybody would willingly believe what one is tackling in his/her whole research paper. Thus, what one can do to make his/her research more credible will be to support them with other works which have spoken about the same topic that one has for his/her research. This is where literature review comes in. A review of related literature is to be made to gain a proper perception and clarity about the research topic. In the historical and contemporary context, the review of research studies in the related area has been useful in understanding appropriate tools and techniques that can be used in appreciating the various evidences generated and policy prescriptions suggested there in.

### What is Literature?

The literature broadly refers to information relevant to the concerned topic of interest. Such works may deal specifically or more generally with the chosen topic of interest. While such information may be obtained from variety of sources, including books, journal articles, reports, etc., the focus is on scholarly published materials. As source of material, it can be categorised as under:

**Primary Source:** Original research from journals, articles or conferences, original materials such as historical documents, or creative works like art or literature.

**Secondary Source:** Evaluations, reviews or syntheses of original work

**Tertiary Source:** Broadly scoped material put together usually from secondary sources to provide an overview, e.g. a textbook.

### **What is Literature Review?**

A **literature review** is a body of text that aims to review the critical points of current knowledge including substantive findings as well as theoretical and methodological contributions to a particular topic. Literature reviews are secondary sources, and as such, do not report any new or original experimental work. In fact it is a **critical and evaluative account** of what has been published on a chosen research topic. It is needless to say that a literature review is *not* a report that summarizes relevant research articles and thesis one by one sequentially. Rather, a literature review is a cohesive account of important bodies of works and arguments in your discipline, and the research articles and thesis that are a part of these bodies of work and arguments. The trick is to choose the bodies of work that are most relevant to your research. Literally speaking the literature review is a critical summary and an assessment of the current state of knowledge or current state of art in a particular field/discipline.

The ability to carry out a literature review is an important skill for any researcher. It will provide a researcher with a context in which to place his/her assignments regardless of the module he/she is studying. Practically, any assignment in any module will involve reading what other people have written on the subject of assignment, gathering information to refute or support specific arguments, and writing about findings. For small scale projects, (like module assignments), it will not be expected to provide a definite account of the state of research in selected topic. It will be required to provide evidence that are read a certain amount of relevant literature in the topic, that one has understood that literature, and that you can summarize the material that has been read in a coherent way. The literature review is precisely that summary. In order to do a literature review researcher will need to spend time for reading the literature relevant to the topic one is researching. Understanding the literature in the chosen research topic will prevent researcher from repeating previous errors, or redoing work which has already been done. It will also give the scholar insights into aspects of his/her topic which might be worthy of exploration and future research.

## Why Literature Review?

There are many reasons why literature review is rendered as a significant part of any **research** work. These are:

- Researchers review literature in order to challenge findings
- Researchers review prior research in order to clarify underlining processes and this is referred to as "component analysis".
- Researchers review earlier studies for the purpose of replication.
- Researchers review literature in order to find out whether findings in one area of social life can be found in another area.
- Finally researchers review past work in order to find out whether the methodology used in the study or the techniques developed from the study of one research problem may be applied for the investigation of another research problem.

Literature review should familiarize the reviewer with existing studies in their finding and what approaches involving research methodology, instrumentation and statistical analysis followed. It will establish a need for the study and likelihood of obtaining meaning, relevant and significant results. Selection and arrangement of literature review is best done in terms of questions to be answered, hypothesis set forth, objectives set for the study. Literature review is a discussion of the research work of other scholars that bear directly upon the present study, reviewer should normally begin the discussion of related literature with the historically oriented writings which have paved the way for our research effort as well as those of others. He/she then can move along to more specific or localized studies which focus closer and closer to his/his specific research problem.

## Stages in Review of Literature Starting from the Title to the Conclusion

The review should normally end with a concise summary of the knowledge which a former researcher contributes to the present study. Having said that, it will be proceeded to state the general guidelines that can assist a researcher to carry out a proper literature review. This is best done by querying the adequacy or otherwise of each stage of the study, starting from the title to the conclusion. Based on the pattern for reporting a typical study, there should be at least six stages. Let us pick

the stage one by one and ask the typical questions a reviewer can ask.

**First Stage:**

The two most prominent components in first stage are the title and the abstract of the study. Therefore a reviewer should ask and answer questions like the following:

- Is the topic reflective of the problem investigated? If the answer is yes, it means the topic is adequate, precise and appropriate. But if no, it shows the topic is inadequate.
- Does the abstract adequately summarize the study? Does it present at a glance what the study is all about?

**Second Stage:**

The prominent components here are: introduction, statement of problem, purpose of study and relevance of study. Therefore, the typical questions a reviewer will ask are:

- Does the introduction provide precise bearings in the light of the topic? Does it open up the mind enough to guide expectation? Yes or No.
- Is the statement of problem unambiguously stated as to enhance appreciation by the reader/reviewer? Does the statement of problem align with the topic? Yes or No.
- Does the purpose highlight the motive for carrying out the study? Yes or No.
- Does the relevance of study indicate benefits accruable to the society, organizations and individuals from findings of the study?

**Third Stage:**

The prominent components in this stage are relevant theories, related studies, hypotheses and operational definition of terms. Therefore the questions a reviewer would normally ask are:

- Is the study connected to a body of existing theories? Yes or No. Is it predicted on existing theories? Yes or No.
- Is reference made to existing related studies? Are the point of convergence and divergence between the two properties illustrated? Yes or No.
- Are the research hypotheses precisely stated? Do they magnify the problem

investigated? Do they specify the relationship between two or more variables and more importantly between independent and dependent variables?

- Are the terms and concepts employed in the study operationally defined i.e. are they explained in terms of the study so that they evoke meaning and comprehension. Yes or No.

#### **Fourth Stage:**

The prominent components here are the setting, subject, sampling technique, instrument used, design and procedure. The reviewer will ask questions like the following

- Are the subjects the right ones? How are they selected?
- Is the setting appropriate?
- Is the appropriate sampling method used? Is the sample size (i.e. number of subjects) large enough to adequately represent the target population?
- Is the appropriate instrument (interview, questionnaire, experiment, observation) used? is the research design appropriate?

#### **Fifth Stage:**

The important components here are: data analysis and result/hypothesis testing. Therefore a reviewer will normally want to know.

- Is the data analysed using the most appropriate statistical analysis method. The appropriate statistical method is that which controls for sources of error so that the finding from the study is non-spurious?
- Is the result interpreted in the light of the hypotheses? Are the hypotheses properly tested at an appropriate level of significance?

#### **Sixth Stage:**

The prominent components are discussion, conclusion, implication of findings and limitations of study.

- Is the findings logically and comprehensively discussed?
- Is the conclusion appropriately drawn?
- Are the implications of findings well specified?
- Are the limitations well expressed?

**Conclusion:**

By asking and answering the above questions in each stage, a reviewer would have done a good job of the study being reviewed. Reviewing articles is not too different from that of a study. In articles, some of the patterned stages will not be applicable.

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