

# Chapter 06

## WRITING REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of literature is an essential component of every scientific presentation. Recent literature must be collected and organized. It should classify, evaluate and present themes or identify trends in the field. A good literature review helps to understand need for the research work to be conducted. It informs why what is being done is worthwhile and what further contribution in the existing knowledge can be made. The review helps to keep abreast of the developments on the specific topic and enables to build on previous work and to go beyond it. It makes the work original and contributes to the knowledge in the field.

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Formulation of a research project requires that the researcher is well aware of the area in which he/she is going to do the research and is conversant with different theories in the field. One must have full knowledge of the findings of other scientists in the discipline and must be aware of the theories and gaps in the problem area. For this purpose, the researcher must seek enlightenment from those well-versed in the area or consult the works of scientists who have tackled this or similar problems in the past. This latter proposal is reflected in the review of literature.

A review of literature is always a standard chapter in a thesis or dissertation manuscript and also forms part of a scientific paper in the introduction. It is an account of what has been published by previous scholars and researchers on a topic. It identifies the dimensions of current work in a given discipline and provides comprehensive and up-to-date information on the topic. Its purpose is to explore an area, which will offer definition and a framework for the piece of research to be conducted. The idea of literature review

is to develop a good working knowledge of the research in the particular area. It places one's project into context of established work in the field. It should classify and evaluate the reports and convey the knowledge and ideas that have been established, along with their strengths and weaknesses. This must be organized according to a guiding concept such as one's research objectives, thesis or issue to be addressed. It is a conceptually organized synthesis of the results of other scientists. The information must be related to the research or issue in question and synthesized into a summary of the known and unknown in the field. A review of literature also identifies any controversy that appears in the literature and develops questions for further research.

The basic requirement for a good review of literature is ability of the researcher to scan the literature efficiently using manual and/or electronic methods and to identify potentially useful articles and books. Further, the literature collected must be critically appraised and the principles of analysis applied to identify those studies which are relevant, unbiased and valid. The review of literature must show just that rather than merely a descriptive list of articles and books.

## **6.2 NEED FOR A LITERATURE REVIEW**

The objective in writing review of literature is not to list as many articles as possible. It should rather, demonstrate the intellectual ability to recognize relevant information, and to synthesize and evaluate it according to the guiding concept that has been determined. The readers of the research paper or thesis not only want to know what literature exists, but also its critical evaluation. To meet both these needs, skills to find relevant literature and synthesise it to the needs of the project must be employed.

A good literature review helps to fully understand need for the research work to be conducted and allows the researcher to know if he/she is on the right track. It informs why what is being done is worthwhile, and what further contribution in the existing knowledge can be made. It demonstrates that the researcher knows the subject. This means more than reporting what has been read and understood. It reflects that the researcher is aware of most important issues, their relevance to the work, the controversies and neglected areas. All this allows the researcher to map the field and position the research within the context.

A review of literature also justifies the reason for research and provides information on the necessity of the work being done. It is the knowledge in the field that allows the researcher to identify the

gap which could be filled. It permits establishing theoretical framework and methodological focus. Even when a new theory or method is being proposed, it is being done in relation to what already exists. The literature review becomes springboard for the whole thesis or the project. In other words, literature review is integral to whole research project and is not just a routine step taken to fulfil formal requirements. In short, a literature review has a number of purposes. It enables you to:

- provide background and justification for the research being undertaken, thereby avoiding unnecessary duplication in work,
- relate the findings to previous knowledge and suggest further research,
- demonstrate your command and understanding of the field, identify trends and assess the current status of research in the field,
- evaluate promising research methods and identify scientists working in the area, and
- identify possible gaps in the literature or the research.

### 6.3 THE CURRENT TREND

A common mistake, especially in literature reviews is that writers present material from one author, followed by information from another, then another in line with an old adage of education, that is:

*"Education is the process in which the ideas pass from the note-book of the teacher to the notebook of the student, without passing through the minds of either".*

This type of review, which, in simple computer language is "cut and paste", does not demonstrate ones understanding of the literature nor the ability to evaluate other people's work. Such a review is usually prepared by inexperienced scientists and postgraduate students who write series of paragraphs, often in chronological order, starting with the names of researchers as: -

- "Sarwar (1995) discovered that ....." "
- "Dogar and Khan (2008) conducted experiments and ....." "
- "Cheema and others (2016) illustrated that ....." "
- "Athar and Muhammad (2009) found that ....." "
- "Zafar (1957) concluded that ....." "

"Rehman *et al.* (2014) reported that ....."

"Yasmin (2017) pointed out that ....."

In these paragraphs everything is copied verbatim which appears in the "Abstract" that has been collected from an abstracting service.

#### 6.4 THE 'CORRECT' APPROACH

The literature review must have a cognitive approach. It should not be a descriptive set of abstracts or summaries. Instead, it should be organized into useful, informative sections that present themes or identify trends and keep abreast of the developments in the field. The value of a review depends not simply on how many references have been collected, but on ones awareness of how these different levels of perspectives affect the way the particular research on the topic is conducted, published and read. The write up should give a true picture and not paint the brighter side only. This will enable to build on previous work and make the proposed work original.

An easy way to this effect is to group authors who draw similar conclusions and link them by using such words as *also, additionally, again, similarly*, and others. When authors disagree, linking words that indicate contrast will show how the work has been analyzed. Such words are *however, conversely, nonetheless, on the other hand*, and others. Sometimes an author's work requires to be qualified by using such words as *specifically, usually or generally*. In other cases, there may be a need to provide examples by employing *thus, namely, to illustrate*, and other such phrases.

Connecting the works of different authors is essential to reflect that the material has passed through the process of understanding, assimilation and analysis. In this way it is ensured that the material is being synthesized and not just listed using the prevailing erroneous 'cut and paste' approach.

#### 6.5 REQUIREMENTS OF A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a need to have a specific problem or research question, which the literature review must help to define. The scope of literature review must be determined. In this regard types of publications required to be scanned such as journals, books, government documents, popular media and others are important. The information-seeking skills have to be good so that relevant information is found from these sources. The search should be wide enough to ensure that the required material has been found.

There must be a specific relationship between the literature chosen to review and the problem being formulated. The literature has to be critically analyzed. It is not sufficient to just list and summarize authors and articles, but their assessment is essential. The strengths and weaknesses of the cited material need to be discussed. The conditions under which a particular study was undertaken need to be critically analysed. Studies contrary to the perspective may also be discussed. The reader must find the literature review relevant, appropriate and useful.

Another major problem is that literature reviews are often written as if they stand alone, without links to the rest of the thesis. A clear relationship between literature review, hypothesis and methodology to follow must exist. At the end of the review, a summary of what the literature implies need to be included. This is required so that it clearly links with ones own hypotheses and methodology.

## **6.6 WRITING PROCESS**

The writing process begins when relevant literature has been collected from printed and electronic sources and has been organized. It should start making some sense at this point. The role that the literature review will play in the research and subsequent scientific paper or thesis should be obvious by now.

No matter how large the review is, it has to be written in parts, section by section. To be able to write it well, the main argument must be kept in mind so that each section fits well and contributes to it. Each section should be seen as a minor whole with its own purpose and structure. Themes and concepts should be followed through and some critical assessment of the materials made. An overall introduction and conclusion to state the scope of coverage and to formulate the question, problem, or concept must illuminate the work. The items should be grouped into sections to help indicate comparisons and relationships. A paragraph or so may be needed to introduce the focus of each section.

The literature review needs to be written several times. Each version will serve a different purpose; hence, there is no need to get depressed that it is not leading to the destination. There would be a need to write the same thing over and over. The trouble arises when one tries to take whole sections out of an earlier version and paste them into the final version which has to be differently conceived. In practical terms, it is necessary to have an overall picture of how the thread runs through the analysis of the literature before one can get down to actually writing a particular section.

### **6.6.1 WRITING STRATEGY**

The strategy generally adopted to begin literature review is to proceed from the general, wider view of the research being reviewed to the specific problem. This is not a formula but is a common pattern and is worth trying. The review should start with basically an introductory section, with a statement of the problem in very broad terms, alerting the reader to the fact that not everything is rosy. It should then proceed to sketch in specific aspects. The text should move on to specify issues at various levels. Although the focus is sharper, coverage at the same time opens out. Thus, the text has set up the situation where all aspects of the problem – theoretical, practical and others are brought together.

Whatever pattern fits the work best, it is necessary to keep in mind that what is being written has been done and written before. But, the previous research is not being reported. Instead, the objective is to write about it in terms of how well it was done and what it achieved. This has to be organised and presented in such a manner that it inevitably leads to what is to be done in the present research and whether this work is worth doing. In fact, a stage is being set for the work to be started.

The earlier versions of the review are usually in the form of a summary that is more or less informative. The final version should reflect that the literature has been well scanned; it has been synthesized and relative merits and demerits of the research become evident. It should now tell in which direction to move. Approaching review in this manner forces one to make judgements and, furthermore, to distinguish the thoughts from assessments made by others. It is this whole process of revealing limitations or recognising the possibility of taking research further which allows formulating and justifying the objectives of the present investigation.

### **6.7 TAKE HOME MESSAGE**

The literature review should be written in the present tense. It should not be closed abruptly and must be concluded by summarizing what has been reviewed.