

The necessity of related literature search and review exercises in dissertation and thesis preparation and writing

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Abstract : *The systematic and scientific study of the related literature is the life cycle of every dissertation/thesis research proposal and research writing process. It is a form of secondary data collection, data analysis, and data presentation. The content we are dealing with here is textual, and the form of secondary data analysis is a form of phenomenologically qualitatively data analysis.*

Keywords: *Related literature search and review, research endeavour, content analysis, secondary data, and dissertation and thesis research proposal and writing processes.*

I. Introduction

The contention is made in social science research that the problem to be studied cannot be systematically and adequately investigated until extensive and detailed study has been undertaken on its content and until the place of the area of study or problem within that context has been properly articulated and clearly determined. This, therefore, calls for systematic related literature searches and review exercises that constitute the subject of this journal article.

Purpose of article

The purpose of this article is to:

- a. demonstrate the variously related literature searches and review exercises
- b. outline the importance of related literature searches and reviews in the social sciences, and
- c. how literature search and review activities are central to productive research dissertation and thesis preparation and eventually writing processes.

II. Literature search and review exercises

Related literature review as the life cycle of writing process

It needs to be understood that receiving the content of literature gathered is a form of research in itself. It is a form of secondary data analysis, and the content we are dealing with here is textual, the form of secondary data analysis is a form of phenomenologically qualitative data analysis.

Thus, the systematic review of the related literature is the life cycle of every dissertation/thesis proposal writing process. Literature review cannot be a systematic account of documented literature by qualified and accredited researchers and scientists.

Literature review questions

The piece of literature must speak loud and clear about research objectives, questions and the problem statement. Literature review should define and strengthen the research. When evaluating literature review in a PhD thesis proposal defense, one must ask oneself:

- Does literature review examine authenticity of the problem statement?
- Does literature review significantly support the severity of one's problem statement?
- Does researcher agree or disagree with existing knowledge and why?
- Is his/her final judgement or conclusions sound, logical and persuasive?
- Does the research find literatures that prove or disapprove his/her problem statement?

Literature searching and reviewing

One definition of a literature review is as follows:

The selection of all available literature in the form of documents both published and unpublished on the topic; that contain ideas, information, data and proof/evidence within from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be systematically investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed.

This is all very well in theory, but it sounds a tall order. Researching the literature comes in two parts, although these parts feed into each other:

Searching for literature

A literature search seeks to find sufficient materials that are related to a topic.

Analysis of its content

A literature search to analyse the content of that gathered materials. Of course, what counts as part of the literature of interest is dependent upon its content, its content relies upon its knowledge content, and knowing its content depends upon finding it in the first place.

But what is *significant* is that the two parts *feed* into each other.

Availability of adequate information

One of the requirements in any social science research undertaking is that there must be available a considerable amount of information of the area. That is, the field of study. Availability of adequate information on the areas or field of study is a prerequisite (*sine qua non*).

The contention is that the problem to be studied cannot be adequately and systematically investigated until extensive study has been carried out on its content and until the place of the area of study or problem within that context has been properly articulated and clearly determined.

Proper orientation to the area of study

The other basic requirements is that there needs to be proper orientation to the area of the study as this creates wide opportunities for the formulation of workable hypotheses to guide our research endeavours. Proper orientation provides further insight into the basic research methodologies that is, appropriate approaches, procedures, methods and techniques of tackling the problem in a logical way.

Therefore, some systematization or other reading which has been undertaken is most essential. Thus effective and significant orientation to the field of study needs to be accompanied by the comprehensive compilation of the relevant bibliography. Effective orientation to the field of study will be all the easier. For the work will be highly complementary.

Eminent scientists and scholars

The following are relevant public administration scientists whose works have been consulted in connection with this study:

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| • Talcott Parsons | • R. K. Merton | • Goode and Hatt |
| • R. B. Smith | • T. S. Kuhn | • S. Lynd |
| • G. Lundberg | • H. Blumer | • P. Lazarsfeld |
| • J. J. N. Cloete | • B. J. Roux | • S. B. M. Marume |
| • P. S. Botes | • W. L. J. Adlem | • H. B. Kruger |
| • R. W. Rowland | • S. X. Hanekom | • E. G. Bain |

Thorough and extensive search and review of the available literature has been vigorously undertaken to enable the writer, that is, the social scientist, to fully orientate him with the field of study.

Importance of related literature searches and reviews

The following statement speaks volumes of the importance of review of related literature in research:

Those who do research belong to a community of scholars, each of whom has journeyed into the unknown territory in order to bring a fact, a truth, or a point of light. What they have recorded of their journeys, experiences and their findings will make it easier for the researcher to explore the unknown territory: to help researcher also discover a fact, a truth, or bring back a point of light.

Source: S. B. M. Marume: MSoc Sc [international politics] thesis: 1985

It is important for researchers to understand the purpose of investigating the literature related to their research problems. Simply stated, it is fundamental among researchers that the more they know about the peripheral investigations germane to their own study, the more knowledgeable they can approach their own research problems.

Such exploration and discussion occupy the section in the research thesis proposal or in the completed research report known as the review of the related literature. Its function is to look again [re + view] at the literature (the reports of what other research scientists have done) in a related area: an area not necessarily identical with, but collateral to, the researcher's own area of study.

Purposes of the literature searches and reviews

What, then it may be asked is the purpose of this review? It has several purposes. Primarily, it is to assist the researcher in attacking the researcher's problem for research. In any research undertaking, the scholar's own research problem is central. Everything also the researcher does, s/he does because it helps him/her resolve his/her problem or answer his/her research questions. When the researcher knows what others have done, the researcher is better prepared to investigate his/her chosen problem with deeper insight and more complete knowledge. But this is only the principal reason for investigating the literature. Such a review can provide the scholar/researcher with many benefits:

- a. It can **reveal** investigations similar to his/her own, and it can show the scholar how other researchers handled methodological and design issues.
- b. It can **describe methods and techniques** of dealing with problem situations that may be similar to difficulties other researchers scholars are facing.
- c. It can **reveal to the scholar sources of data** that the researchers **may not** have known to have **existed**.
- d. It can **introduce** the researcher to important research **personalities whose works** and **collateral writings** the scholar **may not** have known.
- e. It can **help** the researcher see his/her own study in **historical and associational perspectives** and in relation to earlier **approaches** to the **same problems**.
- f. It can **provide** the researcher with **new ideas and approaches** that may not have occurred to the researcher/scholar.
- g. It can **help** the researcher **evaluate** his/her **own research efforts** by comprising them with similar efforts of other scholars/researchers.
- h. It can **increase** the researcher's **confidence** in his/her selected topic if s/he finds that other research scientists in this topic and have found value in investigating time, effort and resources into its study.

Reputable and verifiable bibliographical references

The writer as a social researcher has managed to have a systematic search and review of and to compile a reputable and verifiable bibliographical reference, which appears as Appendix A of the study.

Vital sources of relevant secondary data in the research

The composition of this compiled bibliographical reference is made up of (a) **textbooks**, (b) **manuals, dissertations and theses**; and (c) **public documents**.

The **bibliographical reference** facilitates serious in-depth studies on the selected field of study in a rational and economical manner. The bibliography has also, where possible alphabetically, been arranged so that social scientists seeking a specific item of information can trace it much more quickly and easily.

Library resources

It is important to mention that such a high level study to be successfully undertaken there should exist for academic and research purposes and use, reputable, veritable, adequate and accessible library resources. As far as this study is concerned, tremendous use has been made of the wealthy library facilities which exist at the Libraries. Thus extensive use has been made of all these available library facilities in an honest scientific endeavour to gather as much reliable and valid information as possible from the practically relevant and authentic resources.

Summary on literature searches and reviews:

In sum it is most pertinent in research studies to understand and appreciate that social research takes many forms. The classical experimental method is rare in social research studies, but in other respects much social research adopts a scientific approach. Deductive research seeks to test a proposition and hypothesis, while more inductive research seeks to explore a research question or field. Propositions and hypotheses and research questions emerge from social and political issues and from the researcher's own personal and theoretical motivations. However, research needs to demonstrate that its findings are the result of rigorous methodologies and methods and not simply the motives of the researcher to those who might be funding them. Are human

beings free agents, or social beings? Answers to such speculations shape the kinds of questions we might want to ask and the propositions and hypotheses we might formulate, as we as the level of prediction or explanation we might expect our accounts of society to give us.

It is significant to understand that social life is never fully predictable. Data are what the researcher collects and generates – by asking pertinent questions, carefully observing situations, or deliberately reading relevant literature and human records. Reliability, validity and generalizability are all criteria by which the truth of research can be judged. The quality of the selected sample in relation to the population in question, as well as the quality of the data collection instruments, will determine the profundity and scope of the findings. Some research seeks not only to know the empirical social world, but also to help change it. This methodological approach raises certain ethical, legal and validity questions. Such approaches offer their own solutions as well as shortcomings/limitations.

The development from research question to research design and their smart combinations within a successful dissertation and thesis research proposal should form a logical progression, even as each step along the way will lead to reflections and adjustments of the steps that have gone before.

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