

IMPORTANCE OF REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE IN RESEARCH

Literature review is a written summary of journal articles, books, and other documents that describes the past and current state of information on the topic of your research study. It also organizes the literature into subtopics, and documents the need for a proposed study. In the most rigorous form of research, educators base this review mainly on research reported in journal articles. A good review, however, might also contain other information drawn from conference papers, books, and government documents. In composing a literature review, you may cite articles that are both quantitative and qualitative studies. Regardless of the sources of information, all researchers conduct a literature review as a step in the research process.

The review of related literature involves the systematic identification, location, and analysis of documents containing information related to the research problem. The term is also used to describe the written component of a research plan or report that discusses the reviewed documents. These documents can include articles, abstracts, reviews, monographs, dissertations, books, other research reports, and electronic media effort.

The major purpose of reviewing the literature is to determine what has already been done that relates to your topic. This knowledge not only prevents you from unintentionally duplicating another person's research, but it also gives you the understanding and insight you need to place your topic within a logical framework. Previous studies can provide the rationale for your research hypothesis, and indications of what needs to be done can help you justify the significance of your study. Put simply, the review tells you what has been done and what needs to be done.

Another important purpose of reviewing the literature is to discover research strategies and specific data collection approaches that have or have not been productive in investigations of topics similar to yours. This information will help you avoid other researchers' mistakes and profit from their experiences. It may suggest approaches and procedures that you previously had not considered.

Being familiar with previous research also facilitates interpretation of your study results. The results can be discussed in terms of whether and how they agree with previous findings. If the results contradict previous findings, you can describe differences between your study and the others, providing a rationale for the discrepancy.

Importance of Review of Related Literature

- a. Knowledge of related research enables investigators to define the frontiers of their field.

- b. A thorough review of related theory and research enables researchers to place their questions in perspective.
- c. Reviewing related literature helps researchers to limit their research question and to clarify and define the concepts of the study.
- d. Through studying related research, investigators learn which methodologies have proven useful and which seem less promising.
- e. A thorough search through related research avoids unintentional replication of previous studies.
- f. The study of related literature places researchers in a better position to interpret the significance of their own results.

Functions of Review of Related Literature

- a. The literature review demonstrates the underlying assumptions (i.e., propositions) behind the research questions that are central to the research proposal.
- b. The literature review provides a way for the novice researcher to convince the proposal reviewers that he or she is knowledgeable about the related research and the intellectual traditions that support the proposed study.
- c. The literature review provides the researcher with an opportunity to identify any gaps that may exist in the body of literature and to provide a rationale for how the proposed study may contribute to the existing body of knowledge.
- d. The literature review helps the researcher to refine the research questions and embed them in guiding hypotheses that provide possible directions the researcher may follow.

Steps for conducting a literature review

- 1. Identify and make a list of keywords to guide your literature search.
- 2. Using your keywords, locate primary and secondary sources that pertain to your research topic.
- 3. Evaluate your sources for quality.
- 4. Abstract your sources.
- 5. Analyze and organize your sources using a literature matrix.
- 6. Write the literature review.

Sources of Review of Related Literature

Identifying Keywords

The words you select for your searches will dictate the success of your research. Before you begin your research make a list of possible keywords to guide your literature search. As you progress through your searching, add additional keywords and subject headings related to your search. Most of the initial source works you consult will have alphabetical subject indexes to help you locate information about your topic. You can look in these indexes for the keywords

you have selected. Databases such as the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Education Full Text provide a list of subject headings or descriptors with the search results.

Identifying Sources

For review, you will examine a range of sources that are pertinent to your topic. To start, it is best to consult educational encyclopedias, handbooks, and annual reviews found in libraries. These resources, some of which were mentioned earlier in the discussion on narrowing your topic, provide summaries of important topics in education and reviews of research on various topics. They allow you to get a picture of your topic in the broader context and help you understand where it fits in the field. You may also find these sources useful for identifying search terms and aspects related to your topic that you may not have considered.

The following are some examples of handbooks, encyclopedias, and reviews relevant to educational research:

- The International Encyclopedia of Education
- Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies
- Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts
- Handbook of Research on the Education of Young Children
- Handbook of Latinos and Education: Theory, Research, and Practice
- Handbook of Research on Practices and Outcomes in E-Learning: Issues and Trends
- Handbook of Research on the Education of School Leaders
- Handbook of Research on New Media Literacy at the K–12 Level: Issues and Challenges
- Handbook of Education Policy Research
- Handbook of Research on School Choice
- Handbook of Research on Literacy and Diversity
- Handbook of Education Finance and Policy
- Research on the Socio-cultural Foundations of Education
- Handbook of Research on Schools, Schooling, and Human Development

A **primary source** contains firsthand information, such as an original document or a description of a study written by the person who conducted the study. The data are factual rather than interpretive, so the study is more valued than secondary research. Research reports, dissertations, experiments, surveys, conference proceedings, letters, and interviews are some examples of primary sources. There is a difference between the opinion of an author and the results of an empirical study. The latter is more valued in a review.

A **secondary source** is a source that interprets or analyzes the work of others—either a primary source or another secondary source, such as a brief description of a study written by someone other than the person who conducted it. Secondary sources are often used to review what has already been written or studied. Education encyclopedias, handbooks, and other reference works typically contain secondhand information summarizing research studies conducted on a given

topic. Secondary sources usually give complete bibliographic information for the references cited, so they can direct you to relevant primary sources, which are preferred over secondary sources.

Library

Most libraries, especially university libraries, provide help and education in the use of their resources. you can use the library online catalog and browse the stacks to search for books on your topic. To locate books, video, and other materials such as government documents, you need to conduct a search of the library catalog. To search by topic, begin with a keyword search. In library catalogs, a keyword search will search the entire record of an item that includes the content notes—these are chapter headings or titles of essays within a book.

Computer Databases

The online catalog found in a library is an example of a database, a sortable, analyzable collection of records representing items such as books, documents, DVDs, and videos that are maintained on a computer. Other types of subject specific databases are also used in research to search indexes of articles—some of which are full textbooks, abstracts, or other documents. These databases such as the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Education Fulltext, PsycInfo, and others provide an excellent way to identify primary sources and secondary sources.

The following sections describe some of the commonly used databases for searches of education literature.

Education Resources Information Center (ERIC).

Established in 1966 by the National Library of Education as part of the United States Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement and now sponsored by Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education, ERIC is the largest digital library of education literature in the world. The online database provides information on subjects ranging from early childhood and elementary education to education for gifted children and rural and urban education. ERIC is a formidable database for searching educational materials that is relatively quick and easy to search.

Education Full Text

The Education Full Text database is composed of articles historically available within the Wilson Education Index and references articles published in educational periodicals since 1983. The database provides reference to many articles full text that are not available in the ERIC database, so it is important to search both databases for more comprehensive research. In addition to article abstracts, the database includes citations for yearbooks and monograph series, videotapes, motion picture and computer program reviews, and law cases.

Shodhganga: a reservoir of Indian Theses

Shodhganga is a digital repository of Indian Electronic Theses and Dissertations set up by the INFLIBNET centre. It provides a platform for research scholars to deposit their Ph.D theses and make it available to the entire scholarly community in open access. The repository has the ability to capture, index, and store, disseminate and preserve Electronic Theses and Dissertations submitted by the researchers.

PsycINFO

The PsycINFO database is the online version of Psychological Abstracts, a former print source that presents summaries of completed psychological research studies. PsycINFO contains summaries of journal articles, technical reports, book chapters, and books in the field of psychology. It is organized by subject area according to the PsycINFO classification codes for easy browsing. The classification codes can be accessed at <http://www.apa.org/psycinfo/training/tips-classcodes.html>.

Dissertation Abstracts

Dissertation Abstracts contains bibliographic citations and abstracts from all subject areas for doctoral dissertations and master's theses. If after reading an abstract you want to obtain a copy of the complete dissertation, check to see if it is available in library. If not, speak to a librarian about how to obtain a copy. You can request a dissertation from your library through interlibrary loan.

World Wide Web (WWW)

There is an abundance of educational materials available on the Web—from primary research articles and educational theory to lesson plans and research guides. Researcher can access information in a variety of formats such as video, images, multimedia, PowerPoint presentations, screen captures, tutorials, and more. Blogs, RSS feeds, podcasts, wikis, email, and other Web 2.0 tools offer researchers a variety of alternative means for finding information. Also, as search engines develop to include more sophisticated methods for finding research, both “digital natives” as well as traditional researchers can find primary sources using tools such as Google Scholar, Google Books and more. Even Wikipedia can provide background information that can help a researcher understand fundamental concepts and theory that lead to better keywords and strategies for searching.

Proquest digital dissertations

This database includes abstracts of doctoral dissertations and master's theses dating back to 1861. A wealth of information from more than 1 million dissertations and theses completed at more than 1000 accredited colleges and universities worldwide can be found through this source. It can be searched by key words, titles, and authors. Its hard copy form is Dissertation Abstracts.

JSTOR

This not-for-profit organization's search and store database can be accessed for a fee by way of a JSTOR username and password or through a participating institution. Since 1995, it has been building a high-quality interdisciplinary archive of scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. More than 1000 academic journals and other materials are included in its continuously expanding collection, all of which are full-text searchable.

Google Scholar

Google Scholar available at <http://scholar.google.com> as of November 2004, Google Scholar is an online search engine that targets scholarly materials, such as peer-reviewed publications, book chapters, and conference proceedings, across many disciplines. With this database, you can identify relevant material throughout the world of scholarly research. Search results in Google Scholar are ordered by relevance, so when a search is conducted, those links listed first should be most relevant to your search. The relevance ranking is determined by the text in the article, the article's author, the publication, and the frequency of the citation of the article in the scholarly literature.

Online journals

Many journals have been produced in a strictly online format and are frequently referred to as e-journals. That is, these journals are not available in print but are only available on the Internet. In education, the premier research association is the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Within AERA, subgroups address particular interests in educational research. These are called divisions and special-interest groups (SIGs). One such SIG is the Communication of Research SIG. This SIG maintains a website listing many of the online journals in the field of education. The SIG and the listing of e-journals are available at <http://aera-cr.asu.edu/index.html>. Through the website, the content of nearly 200 e-journals can be accessed.

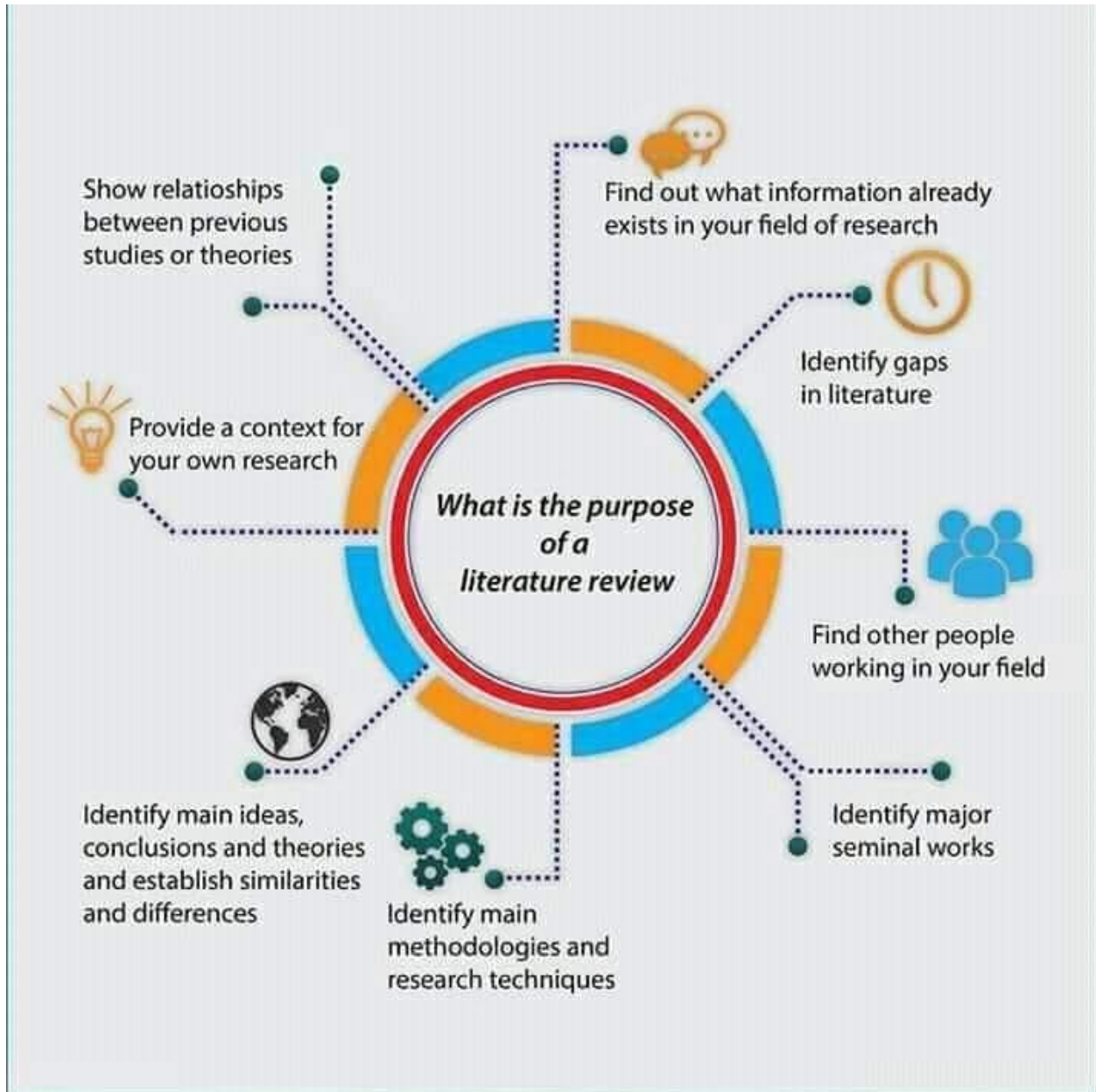
Organizing the Related Literature

After satisfied that you have carried out a reasonably comprehensive search of the literature in the field, you can proceed to the task of organizing it. A useful approach is to arrange the studies by topic and determine how each of these topics relates to your own study.

Followings are some suggestions for organizing the related literature

- Begin reading the most recent studies in the field and then work backward through earlier volumes.
- Read the abstract or summary sections of a report first to determine whether it is relevant to the question.
- Before taking notes, skim the report quickly to find those sections that are related to the question—another way to save reading time.
- Make notes on file cards, in a word processing program, or in some format that can be accessed easily or moved around to cluster with other notes on related research.

- Write out a separate complete bibliographic reference for each work.
- If you searched online databases, keep the search strategies (often called “search histories”) on file.



Suggested Reading

Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen, C., and Razavieh, A. (2010), Introduction to Research in Education, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, Canada.

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