

Step 2. Reviewing the literature:

After the identification of your research idea and a general problem that sounds interesting to you as well as to the field of investigation, you need to know about what has been published on your topic. This will help you to check if your topic has been researched and whether it requires revision. Moreover, the literature review can help you in designing the study. The most important thing is that after a thorough literature review, both your specific research questions and the design of the study will be clearer.

Literature review in your research proposal is to:

- a. Bring clarity and focus to your research problem;
- b. Improve your methodology;
- c. Broaden your knowledge;
- d. Contextualise your findings.

a. Bring clarity and focus to your research problem;

The process of reviewing the literature helps you to understand the subject area better and thus helps you to conceptualise your research problem clearly and precisely. It also helps you to understand the relationship between your research problem and the body of knowledge in the area.

b. Improve your methodology:

A literature review tells you if others have used procedures and methods similar to the ones that you are proposing, which procedures and methods have worked well for them, and what problems they have faced with them. Thus you will be better positioned to select a methodology that is capable of providing valid answer to your research questions.

c. Broaden your knowledge base in your research area:

It ensures you to read widely around the subject area in which you intend to conduct your research study. As you are expected to be an expert in your area of study, it helps fulfil this expectation. It also helps you to understand how the findings of your study fit into the existing body of knowledge.

d..Contextualise your findings:

What contribution have you been able to make in to the existing body of knowledge? How are your findings different from those of others? For you to be able to answer these questions, you need to go back to your literature review. It is important to place your findings in the context of what is already known in your field of enquiry.

Procedure for reviewing the literature:

- i) search for existing literature in your area of study;
- ii) review the literature selected;
- iii) develop a theoretical framework;
- iv) develop a conceptual framework.

To effectively search for literature in your field of enquiry, it is imperative that you have in mind at least some idea of broad subject area and of the problem you wish to investigate, in order to set parameters for your search. Next, compile a bibliography for this broad area. Sources are: books and journals

Journals provide you with the most up-to-date information, even though there is a gap of two to three years between the completion of a research project and the publication in a journal.

As with books, you need to prepare a list of journals for identifying literature relevant to your study. This can be done as follows:

- locate the hard copies of the journal that are appropriate to your study;
- use the internet
- look at the index of research abstracts in the relevant field to identify and read the articles.

Whichever method you choose, first identify the journals you want to look at in more detail for your review of literature. Select the latest issue, and examine its content page to see if there is an article of relevance to your research topic. If you feel a particular article is of relevance to you, read its abstract. If you think you are likely to use it, photocopy or prepare a summary and record it for reference for later use.

Review the literature selected:

After identifying books and articles as useful, the next step is to start reading them critically to

pull together themes and issues that are associated. If you do not have a theoretical framework of themes in mind to start with, use separate sheets of paper for each article or book. Once you develop a rough framework, slot the findings from the material so far reviewed into that framework, using a separate sheet of paper for each theme of that framework. As you read further, go on slotting the information where it logically belongs under the theme so far developed. You may need to add more themes as you go.

Read critically with particular reference to the following aspects:

- Note whether the knowledge relevant to your theoretical framework is confirmed beyond doubt.
- Note the theories put forward, the criticisms of these and their basis, the methodologies adopted and the criticisms of them.
- Examine to what extent the findings can be generalized to other situations.

Develop a theoretical framework:

As you have limited time it is important to set parameters by reviewing the literature in relation to some main themes pertinent to your research topic. As you start reading the literature, you will realize that it deals with a number of aspects that have a direct and indirect bearing on your research topic. Use these aspects as a basis for developing your theoretical framework. Until you go through the literature you cannot develop a theoretical framework and until you have developed a theoretical framework; you cannot effectively review the literature.

Literature pertinent to your study may deal with two types of information:

- universal;
- more specific(i.e. local trends or specific program)

In writing about such information you should start with the general information, gradually narrowing down to the specific.

Writing up the literature reviewed:

In order to comply with the first function of literature review *i.e. to provide theoretical background to your study*:

-List the main themes that have emerged while reading literature.

-Convert them into subheadings. These subheadings should be precise, and descriptive of the theme in question, and follow a logical progression.

-Now, under each subheading, record the main findings with respect to the theme in the question, highlighting the reasons for and against an argument if they exist, and identify gaps and issues.

In order to comply with the second function of the literature review *i.e. contextualising the findings of your study*- requires you to very systematically compare your findings with those made by others. Quote from these studies to show how your findings contradict, confirm or add to them. It places your findings in the context of what others have found out. This function is undertaken *when writing about your findings i.e. after analysis of your data*