

Welcome to Qualitative Research

Week 6 ***Lecture 3*** ***Critical Literature Review***

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How to write an effective Lit Rev:

An academic literature review is:

- The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic;
- contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint;
- fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and;
- Provide effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed

So,

A literature review is:

- a narrative account of information that is already currently available, accessible and published,
- may be written from a number of differing paradigms or perspectives, depending on the standpoint of the writer.

As a researcher....

- What you add is an effective, analytical, original assessment of previously published information.
- The aim of doing a literature review is to find out what is already known about a specific topic.

The objectives of a literature review may therefore be:

- To summarise current knowledge.
- To generate and refine your own research ideas.

Above all,

- To provide a critical review which demonstrates:
- awareness of the current state of knowledge in the subject area (description skills)
- A synthesis of resources showing the strengths and limitations, omissions and bias (critical skills); and
- how the research fits into this wider context (analytical skills)

To Begin

- When you are ready to start the analysis begin by reading two or three papers
- See what they have in common.
- Then note down, how do they differ?
- What is the same?

The key questions

- The key questions can be used to assess the validity and relevance of a research article

The abstract

- Is there an abstract?
- Does it provide a concise overview of the research?
- Does it identify the research problem?
- Does it outline the methods used, main findings and recommendations?

Is the study's RQ relevant?

- Even if a study is of the highest methodological rigor, it is of little value unless it addresses an important topic and adds to what is already known about that subject.
- The assessment of whether the RQ is relevant is inevitably based on subjective opinion, as what might be crucial to some will be irrelevant to others.
- Nonetheless, the first question to ask of any research article is whether its topic is relevant to your own field of work.

The literature

- Is the problem clearly identified?
- Is a rationale given for the research?
- Is the literature up to date?
- Is the literature relevant to the research?
- Does the literature present a balanced view?
- Does the literature identify a need for the research proposed?
- Are there any gaps in the topics of the literature reviewed?

What type of research question does the study pose?

The most fundamental task of critical appraisal is:

- to identify the specific RQ an article addresses, as this process will determine the optimal study design and have a major bearing on the importance and relevance of the findings.

The Methodology

- Are the methods consistent with qualitative or quantitative research?
- Is the approach clearly stated?
- Are the methods clearly explained and justified? Are important details provided, so that the research could be replicated by someone else?
- Are details of data collection clearly described and justified?
- Are any ethical considerations described and explained?

Did the study methods address the key potential sources of bias?

- The presence of bias does not imply a preconception on the part of the researcher, but rather means that the results of a study have deviated from the truth.
- Bias can be attributed to chance (e.g. a random error) or to the study methods (systematic bias).

Findings

- Are the results presented clearly and consistently?
- Are any graphs or tables clearly presented and coherent?
- Is sufficient detail provided?
- Are any gaps in the data-gathering accounted for?

Discussions

- Is the discussion and analysis balanced?
- Are the strengths and weaknesses of the study acknowledged?
- Does the discussion refer back to points raised in the lit review?

Conclusions

- Are the conclusions supported by the results?
- Are the implications of the study identified?

Recommendations

- Do the recommendations outline areas of possible future research?
- Do they recommend ways in which current research could be improved?

Does the study add anything new?

- Scientific-research endeavour is often likened to ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’, because new ideas and knowledge are developed on the basis of previous work.
- Seminal research papers that make a substantive new contribution to knowledge are a relative rarity, but research that makes an incremental advance can also be of value.
- For example, a study might increase confidence in the validity of previous research by replicating its findings
- Or might enhance the ability to generalize a study by extending the original research findings to a new population in a different context.

What your critical Lit Rev needs to show

- Provide the reader with the key academic theories in your topic area. .
- Include the current opinions of the key writers, or scholars, in your topic.
- Demonstrate an up to date awareness of theory, and use of concepts.
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of previous work.
- Through clear referencing enable others to follow up the work you cite.
- Use accurate and complete referencing.