

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. What is a literature review?

Simply defined, a *literature review* is a summary and a critical evaluation of the studies relevant to the research problem being investigated. It is usually written as a separate chapter at the start of the thesis. A good literature review doesn't just summarize sources – it analyzes, synthesizes, and critically evaluates them to give a clear picture of the state of knowledge on the subject.

Reviewing the literature has two phases. The first phase includes identifying all the relevant published material in the problem area and reading that part of it with which we are not thoroughly familiar. The second phase of the literature review involves writing this foundation of ideas into a section of the research to define the key concepts, explain the rationale for the study, summarize previous studies, identify the gaps, and formulate a research question. As a piece of writing, the literature review must be defined by a guiding concept (e.g., your research objective, the problem or issue you are discussing, or your argumentative thesis).

### 2.2. The purpose of a literature review

The purpose of the literature review is to:

- a) Clearly define the variables and the scope of the study.
- b) Explain the rationale for the study (why is the research problem important?).
- c) Clarify what has been done and the ideas that have been established on the research topic (theories).
- d) Summarize the findings of the previous studies and critically evaluate them to identify the gaps.
- e) Help in formulating research questions that require further research.

### 2.3. Types of academic sources

The following are the acceptable academic sources in an order from the most reliable to the less reliable:

- 1) **Peer-reviewed** articles in international journals.
- 2) Books and book chapters in **edited books**.
- 3) Conference papers and research reports.
- 4) Government documents and databases.
- 5) MA theses and PhD theses.
- 6) Articles in non-refereed journals, website articles, popular-newspapers, and magazines.

### 2.4. Organizing the literature review section

The organization of the literature varies across topics and field. However, the literature review follows a general structure:

- 1) **Background information:** in this section, the researcher introduces and defines the main concepts of the study and provides a context for it.
- 2) **The rationale for the study:** in this section, the researcher explains the purpose of the study and why it is important to address it.
- 3) **Theoretical framework:** in this section, the researcher outlines theories in the area of the research topic and presents the theoretical perspective that will be adopted in the study.
- 4) **Review of the literature:** in this section, the researcher presents what was done and what did the previous studies find and how are the findings similar or different from each other. A literature review is a piece of critical writing, not a list describing or summarizing one piece of literature after another. It's usually a bad sign to see every paragraph beginning with the name of a researcher. Instead, it is preferable at this stage to organize the studies into sections that present themes or identify trends and critically evaluate them. In doing so the researcher can address key areas like: the main idea, population and sample size, context, research design, results, limitations and biases of the studies.
- 5) **Critical evaluation and identification of the research gap:** by the end of the literature review, the researcher summarizes the main ideas in the literature, compare and contrast their methodologies and findings, and (most importantly) *highlight gaps* in the research literature.

## 2.5. Research questions

A research question is an answerable inquiry into a specific concern or issue. It is the initial step in your research project. The “initial step” means after you have an idea of what you want to study, the research question is the first active step in your project. *The researcher arrives at the research question by reading the literature and understanding the history behind current issues.* Although helpful, personal interest and/ or experience are not enough to formulate sound research questions.

Research questions express the relationships or phenomena you are going to explore. For example, in the general area of “use of the target language in the classroom”, you might want to explore the following question:

- Are there any differences between more and less experienced teachers’ use of the target language?

Research questions can have sub-questions:

- a) Do more experienced teachers use more target language than less experienced teachers?
- b) Do more experienced teachers use target language for different functions in the classroom compared to less experienced teachers?

- **Research variables (cause and effect)**

**Dependent variable:** The variable that is influenced by the independent variable.

**Independent variable:** The factor that causes the dependent variable to change.

*Example: The influence of English media on EFL learners’ listening comprehension*

## 2.6. Hypotheses

Research hypotheses can be used to express what the researcher expects the results of the investigation to be. The hypotheses are based on observations or on what the literature suggests the answers might be (Mackey & Gass, 2005: 19). There are two main types of research hypotheses, namely: directional and non-directional.

1. **Non-directional** (two-tailed): In these types of hypotheses, the researcher is not interested in the direction of the difference, or simply whether a difference exists between two or more variables; a difference between variables is predicted, but its direction is not specified.

Examples:

- There will be no differences between the four teachers with regards to how often they use the target language for giving instructions in the class.
- There will be a difference between young and adult EFL learners in their willingness to use the target language in the classroom.
- There will be a relationship between family income and students’ academic performance.

2. **Directional** (one-tailed): In these types of hypotheses, the researcher indicates the predicted direction of the relationship between two or more variables.

Examples:

- Older learners will prefer speaking more than younger learners.
- Novice teachers will give less instructions in the target language than experienced teachers.
- There will be a positive correlation between students’ study time and exam marks.

## ACTIVITY

Read the following hypotheses carefully and indicate whether they are directional or non-directional:

1. The younger the age of acquisition, the more native-like pronunciation of the L2 will be.
2. There will be a correlation between scholastic achievement and self-concept of high school students.
3. The less stressed one is, the higher one’s performance is in intelligence tests.
4. Adults will correctly recall more words than children.
5. There will be a significant effect of English media exposure on EFL learners’ listening comprehension.