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Abstract: *As an integral part of dissertations and theses, research scholars in different disciplines require to write a comprehensive chapter on “literature review” that establishes the conceptual and theoretical foundations of an empirical research study. This, however, poses an intellectual challenge to produce a critical review of the published research on a given topic. Therefore, this paper addresses the students' problems of writing the literature review in a thesis or dissertation at the graduate and postgraduate levels. It explains the process and steps of reviewing literature for a thesis chapter. These steps include; a) critical reading and note-taking, b) writing a summary of the reviewed literature, c) organization of literature review, and d) the use of a synthesis matrix. The last part of the paper offers suggestions on how to write critically and make the researcher's voice explicit in the chapter.*

Key Words:

Literature, Dissertations, Critical Reading, Note-Taking

Writing a Critical Review of Literature: A Practical Guide for English Graduate Students

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Introduction

Writing a literature review is a prime factor that establishes a conceptual and theoretical foundation of a research topic. It is an important academic skill that enables researchers to explore, analyze and synthesize published work in a field and make connections between existing studies and their own research. A poorly conceptualized chapter on a literature review may spoil the purpose of a research project as it is not easy to conduct a review of literature unless a researcher comprehends the theories, concepts and related research in the field (Boote & Beile, 2005). We, as thesis examiners and supervisors have noted that our postgraduate students find it a rigorous experience and often struggle to write a critical literature review. As a key to successful theses and dissertations, Randolph (2009) believes that experienced thesis

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examiners often read and assess the literature review of a thesis first, which gives them an idea of the students' understanding of the research in the field. Boote and Beile (2005) observed that examiners often begin reviewing a thesis with a belief that a student would not pass it straight away. A poorly written review of literature gives a clue to the examiners that subsequent chapters of a thesis might have serious issues. If a chapter on the literature review does not meet the standards, examiners review the methodology chapter more prudently.

Although thesis supervisors, advisors and teachers emphasize a well-written literature review, it is noticed that examiners find various problems with students' approaches to writing. One key reason for students' failure to produce a critical review of the literature could be their lack of exposure to published information and lack of understanding of the steps to undertake a review of relevant literature on a subject. Boot and Beile (2005) also believe that most of the doctoral students often find it difficult to seek guidance on how to develop their skills in reviewing literature owing to their lack of training in analyzing, summarizing, and synthesizing existing research in their respective fields of research.

A successful review of the literature demonstrates that a researcher has a solid foundation of the knowledge of the topic and he/she can critically evaluate already published work. It also suggests the researcher's ability to integrate and summarize already published work and make it interesting to stimulate new ideas. However, Rudestam and Newton (2007) assert that the literature review should not be taken as a "laundry list" of previously published research, and hence students have to read extensively in order to develop their knowledge of the research topic and give a comprehensive picture of the existing literature on the topic. Nevertheless, it is often a challenge for them to select, review, synthesize and summarize the most appropriate information for their theses and dissertations. These problems can also be found in the research articles that novice researchers or students publish in peer-reviewed journals. Since there is a lack of guided support for postgraduate students to write an acceptable and sound literature review to meet the examination criteria, we intend to provide a practical guide to the students in order to write a critical review of the literature and overcome the most baffling problems in this process. We hope that this paper will help students in developing their understanding of how to explore their area of research and gain a thorough knowledge of the existing body of literature.

The Meaning and Purpose of a Literature Review

For novice researchers and research students, it is not always an easy task to carry out a review of the literature as a large number of databases, books, journals, and thesis often frustrates them in choosing the most appropriate information for their own purpose. In this respect, Diana Ridley (2012) suggests that students should first understand 'what a literature review is' before they embark on this challenge.

She explains that this part of the thesis mainly gives a broad reference to existing research on a given topic. It is here where researchers position themselves in research while citing and connecting to other available sources on the topic. Ridley (2012) further elaborates that a literature review offers researchers an opportunity to engage themselves with current literature and other investigators in the field while showing understanding of a pertinent body of knowledge that underpins their own research (Ridley, 2012).

As an essential portion of the thesis, a chapter on literature review is usually preceded by the introduction chapter. Introduction to the thesis helps in scene setting and articulating the aims, scope, and significance of a study. Nevertheless, researchers often cite authors to make a strong case at the very outset of a thesis. It is suggested that the introduction chapter should not be more than 10 percent of the entire thesis or dissertation and 20 percent of the chapter on the literature review (Ridley, 2012). Thus, the introduction chapter should lead into the literature review which will develop a theoretical and conceptual understanding of a research phenomenon.

Broadly speaking, a literature review is a section or chapter that appears in a dissertation or thesis which identifies theories, explores concepts and reviews studies on a particular topic. It helps researchers to identify or find a gap in current literature, problematize a research area and formulate research questions in order to fill that void. Moreover, it is an exploration of the existing research in an area that develops a researcher's understanding of a problem in relation to theories, concepts, methodologies, findings, analysis and interpretations of others, based on which researchers lay a foundation of their research studies. In a nutshell, the review of literature is a succinct analysis of the studies done in a field that enables researchers to analyze it critically and assess its relevance in a given context. Fink (2005) views literature review as "a systematic and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and interpreting the existing body of recorded work produced by researchers" (ibid., p.3). In her seminal work, Ridley (2012, p.3) cites a number of influential writers who have defined 'literature review' for the purpose of theses and dissertations. Some of the definitions from her work can facilitate our understanding of the meaning and purpose of a literature review.

Similarly, on the aims and objectives of a chapter on literature, Blaxter et al. (2010) believe it helps researchers to locate their work, establish its background or context, and link it to previously done research on the topic. Phillips and Pugh (2010) also maintain that this is a key chapter which should illustrate the researcher's background theory and a complete professional understanding of the theory.

The above definitions show that one of the key purposes of 'the literature review' is to define key terms, definitions, and terminology. In a literature review, researchers identify studies, models, case studies that support the research topic, establish the area of study and acknowledge the work of influential authors in the

field. More importantly, it finds a theoretical and conceptual basis for the proposed research that leads to the analysis and discussion of the findings later in a research project. Finally, with a researcher's own voice and critical appreciation of the current debates, the review of literature is considered an authentic scholarly document that is publishable (LeCompte et al. 2003).

The literature review might serve different purposes in varied situations subject to the nature, breadth, and context of the project. It is mainly concerned with exploring what research is (theory), how the study is designed and conducted (methodology) and what is lacking in current literature (research gap). In successful reviews of literature, a researcher often develops his/her own ideas while critiquing the authors' standpoint. It also shows a coherent connection between similar views in literature as well as contrasting opinions of findings, which adds to the criticality of a researcher's work. Ridley (2012) succinctly summarizes nine key purposes that involve the process of literature review:

- it provides a historical background for your research;
- it gives an overview of the current context in which your research is situated by referring to contemporary debates, issues, and questions in the field;
- it provides supporting evidence for a practical problem or issue which your research is addressing, thereby underlining its significance. (Ridley, 2012, p. 24)

Hart (1998) adds to this list and points out nine more purposes of reviewing the literature. It helps to: a) understand existing work and work that needs to be done on a given topic; b) summarize, synthesize and obtain innovative perspectives on the topic; c) ascertain and establish associations between practices and ideas; d) understand and establish the context of research topic; e) rationalize and justify the importance of a research problem; f) learn and develop relevant vocabulary on the subject; g) comprehend the organization of the research topic; h) link perspectives and theories to their applications, i) distinguish the key methods and methodologies that have been employed by previously done studies; and j) place the project in its historical context to indicate understanding of the most recent and advanced developments in the field.

The above-mentioned definitions and purposes of 'literature review' indicate its significant role in a research project. It establishes the theoretical and conceptual framework of a study and informs an area of investigation by acknowledging already conducted or existing research in the field. Therefore, it is extremely vital for the students to understand, practice and master the process of the literature review as it will not only help in founding a theoretical framework, it will also justify their choice of methodology, methods, and approaches to the research studies.

The Process of Literature Review

Critical Reading and Note-Taking

The first and foremost important step in the process of a literature review is to read with a critical and analytical eye and take notes while assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the authors' work. It helps the researchers to evaluate their own topics and compare or contrast their merits or demerits in light of the literature. Ridley (2012) advises students not to feel overwhelmed by the great quantity of published research, as the amount of reading will automatically reduce once the topic is fine-tuned and focused. Subsequently, you will be in a better position to choose the right journals and read relevant books and papers. In order to effectively read, comprehend and analyze published work, Ridley (2012) has suggested an SQ3R technique which stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recall, and Review. This acronym is actually a five-step exercise for reading literature:

1. **Survey** the manuscript to determine the overall idea.
2. **Question** - while reviewing the text, consider questions that might help you choose the text for your chapter.
3. **Read** the paper or article with care and attention to decide whether it can be added to your chapter on the literature review.
4. **Recall** the key facts once you have finished reading the text.
5. **Review** the text for main ideas to ascertain the key points that are important for your research project. (Ridley, 2012, p. 64)

Ridley's strategy is useful in ascertaining relevant information in the text and making connections to the research topic. The five steps of reading require researchers to adopt a critical approach towards reading published works. In order to be critical of a text, Ridley's (2012) seven points is a useful framework that students often lack knowledge about. She has posted seven questions that would help the students to reflect on their approach to reviewing literature.

1. What is the author's central argument or main point?
2. What conclusions does the author reach?
3. What evidence does the author put forward in support of his or her arguments and conclusions?
4. Do you think the evidence is strong enough to support the arguments and conclusions?
5. Does the author make any unstated assumptions about shared beliefs?
6. Can these assumptions be challenged?
7. What is the background context in which the text was written? (Ridley 2012, p. 66).

While applying the SQ3R technique, researchers should have the above-mentioned seven questions in mind. Asking these questions will add a critical and analytical flavor to the literature review section of their theses or dissertations. It

will also aid researchers to identify and understand key ideas in a manuscript, recollect and apply them to their work later, establish links between various sources, reorganize relevant material and evade plagiarism (Ridley, 2012). In addition, if researchers read with an objective in mind to swiftly find, appraise and review appropriate studies, they can assess the suitability of the text. This involves skimming the text and reading through the abstract, table of contents, and headings or sub-headings of a text. Once the manuscript is considered pertinent, researchers can scan it and read it in more depth to find detailed information and gain a wider understanding of the topic. During this whole process, it is suggested that students evaluate and critique the material with an objective approach.

Writing a Summary of Reviewed Literature

Following the reading stage of the published literature, the second important phase is to write a summary of the key points or findings. Generally, reading and writing are interlinked processes and researchers often read and make notes simultaneously. However, it can be a separate phase to put together various views (similar or contrasting) of authors on a given topic. In Ridley's (2012) opinion, a 'summary' is a brief synopsis of a text, which does not include all the details; rather it contains the key points retrieved from the original text. It is not paraphrasing or rewording of the text. In fact, the purpose is to rephrase the whole text focusing on the significant points (Ridley, 2012, p. 73).

A summary will mainly draw on the main points, theories and key issues identified in the text. It will highlight the authors' stated aims and purposes and what research questions they pose. Moreover, it will explain the adopted research methods and methodology in a study. A comprehensive summary will also include the author's discussion and conclusion of the key findings. Last but not least, a summary will indicate any drawbacks or shortcomings in a study in relation to the chosen methods and methodology as well as the results and claims made by authors.

A summary of the literature review can either be 'global' or 'selective' as pointed out by Ridley (2012). A global summary refers to the summarization of the full content in a text, for instance, abstracts given in journal articles, thesis and dissertations are deemed as global summaries. On the contrary, a selective summary is the extraction of pertinent details from small pieces of text for specific purposes in order to support an argument by making a reference to an author's findings or views (Ridley, 2012).

Ridley (2012) suggests five techniques to write global or selective summaries. First, it is important to note, highlight or annotate the key points in a text. Second, write a summary of the text, acknowledge the main source and write down the key points that the original text is trying to make. Third, rewrite the summary with all the necessary points given in a logical and coherent order. Fourth, go back to the main text and compare your points to the original text in order to make sure that

you have incorporated all the key points. Last, your summary should indicate the authors' original thoughts and their main ideas, any comments of your own should be clearly signaled.

As a result of summarizing various research studies on a topic, researchers will have a number of summaries that would require organization according to various headings and sub-headings in the chapter.

Organizing the Literature Review

Having searched different sources and read and summarize numerous materials, the next stage is to organize and give a structure to all these similar and contrasting ideas which were generated as a result of reading, note-taking and summarizing. A coherent literature review will appear as a stimulating story with varied agreements and disagreements between researchers, interesting contradictions and similarities between findings, intriguing and unanswered questions, significant gaps in the literature and possible directions for future research. This will require researchers to draw an outline and arrange or structure the reviewed literature into main sections, themes, headings, and sub-headings. It is important to note that this process of organization and structuring of a literature review is not a linear one; rather it is cyclical, continuous and interconnected as researchers often come back to various sections, themes and headings to modify, reword and tweak them as required. This mind map leads to categories and themes that help in creating an initial or a tentative outline of the literature review chapter. Although literature review chapters vary with focus and objectives, Ridley (2012) suggests three key points which should be integrated into the chapter. First of all, a chapter on the literature review should have an introduction explaining the process and sub-sections of the organization of the chapter. Then, the heading and subheading should be coherently linked showing different strands of a researcher's main argument. Finally, the chapter should end with a summary reiterating the main arguments in a succinct manner.

Going beyond the initial structure, the researchers will bring more clarity to the reviewed literature by citing different sources and authors to make a coherent and convincing argument. Weissberg and Buker (1990, p. 45-6, cited in Ridley, 2012) recommended three ways of doing so. Firstly, studies which are most distantly connected to your research and then research that is most closely linked to your study should be included in the chapter. Secondly, the chapter should indicate a chronological order of the earliest and recent work related to the topic. Finally, the chapter should illustrate various approaches, characteristics, and features of others' work by comparing and contrasting them in a logical order.

As novice researchers and graduate students often experience difficulty organizing the literature, Ridley (2012) simplifies this process and suggests that researchers should divide the literature review chapter into two major sections.

According to her, one section should give details on the present state of knowledge in the field whereas the follow-up section can delineate reviews and critiques of empirical research studies on the topic in order to show their relevance to the researchers' own work. Furthermore, these steps will lead to identifying a research gap in current literature helping researchers to show the relevance and importance of their work and its contribution to the existing literature. It is also worth mentioning that the identified gap in the literature helps in formulating the research questions and shaping the methodological foundations of research. For instance, if there is a lack of research on a topic in a particular context, researchers can add a research question to investigate the research phenomenon in that context. Similarly, if the reviewed studies indicate their paradigmatic and methodological similarities, researchers may follow the same path or they may try to use another methodology bearing the suitability of their research in mind.

As students often store loads of research papers, e.g. systematic reviews, theoretical papers, and empirical papers (quantitative/qualitative or both) to review the literature on a given topic, it is important to identify and group them accordingly to their nature. This will help in developing familiarity with the authors' work and writing a critical appraisal of the papers in a later stage. However, it is important to do this categorization after summarizing the key studies, which will facilitate the process of organizing the reviewed literature.

Using a Synthesis Matrix

In order to determine our existing knowledge and understanding of the topic, researchers need to show a synthesis of different topics and sub-topics and present them in chronological order. One approach to summarizing and presenting research studies is the use of a matrix which is a complete picture of the existing research on a given topic in various contexts. This stage of the literature review ideally comes after reading, note-taking and summarizing the relevant studies. In terms of the structure, a synthesis matrix can be included at the end of the chapter to help readers recap and conclude the whole chapter. A synthesis matrix is a chart with different columns that allows researchers to sort or categorize various points, arguments, and details related to reviewed studies. At this stage of the literature review, researchers should have a complete sense of the research in the field. Therefore, they should be able to record the most important information in the matrix, e.g. authors' names, purposes of the study, method(s) and methodology, sample size, duration of the study, and key findings. The table below is a sound illustration of summarizing and synthesizing studies in a table.

Table 1. A Sample of Synthesis Matrix

Author's names	Purpose	Method	Sample Size	Duration	Factors Facilitated Leadership Development
Inman (2007)	To explore the life experiences of leader-academics & understand how they learned to lead in the UK universities.	Semi-structured biographical interviews	Eighteen academic leaders	6	Critical incidents/Influence of significant people /Self-learning /On-the-job informal learning /Formal mentoring /Participation in networks /Reflection on practices
Rhodes & Brundrett (2009)	To explore factors assisting leadership development of teachers in the US context.	Focus group interviews & a questionnaire	191 Middle-leaders & 168 classroom teachers of 70 primary & secondary schools	24	Collaborative efforts/Commitment to professional learning/Availing opportunities for direct leadership experience/Mentorship
Newsom (2010)	To understand the development of urban elementary teacher leaders in the US context.	Semi-structured interviews & post-interview written reflections	5 teacher leaders	3	Formal & informal PD activities/Commitment /Self-efficacy/ Ability to switch between various leadership roles/Develop constructive working relations with their colleagues and administrators.
Stephenson (2012)	To explore leadership perspectives and identity formation of TESOL leaders from around the globe.	Biographical interviews	5 TESOL leaders	3	Critical events in professional lives/ The influence of significant people/ The impact of shared leadership practices.
Stephenson, Dada & Harold (2012)	To see the influence of the professional	Interviews, Focus group discussions, observations,	8 teacher leaders	7	The impact of a shared form of leadership roles/ Understanding of institutional and

	development processes on teacher leadership development in the context of UAE schools	dialogue, retrospective analysis & field notes			cultural challenges/ Shared motivation/ Formal and informal leadership roles/ Content and pedagogical knowledge/Critical reflection/Interpersonal skills.
Hunzicker (2012)	To understand how elementary teachers learned to exercise informal leadership in the US context.	Reflective writings/ questionnaire responses & focus group discussions	Multiple Case-studies/ 10 middle & elementary school teachers	12	Learning through exercising leadership/ Exposure to research-based practices/Self-efficacy/ Serving beyond the classroom
Hunzicker (2013)	To know the key dispositions of emerging teacher leadership that help teachers to exercise informal leadership in the US context.	Reflective writings, questionnaire responses, and focus group discussions	Multiple Case-studies/ 8 middle & elementary school teachers	12	Collegial professional relationships/ Student-centered mindset/Constant pursuit of professional growth.
Sanocki (2013)	To understand the process of becoming a teacher leader and how teacher leadership is distributed in US schools.	Face-to-face interviews & multiple e-mail correspondences	8 teacher leaders	3	Leadership roles/ Operate & communicate in a PLC/ Commitment to organizational effectiveness.
Higgins (2013)	To investigate teacher leadership and	Face-to-face ethnographic interviews, observations,	5 math teacher leaders	6	Informal experiential learning/Experiencing leadership outside workplace/Learning

	professional learning in a secondary school in the USA.	& document analysis			from formal PD opportunities/
Alexandrou, Swaffield & MacBeath (2014)	To explore ways and activities that helped teachers develop their leadership capacities in Scottish schools.	Face-to-face interviews, focus groups & written reflections	2 secondary school teachers & the Assistant General Secretary of CPD programme	11	Interactive activities PD opportunities/Powerful learning experiences of the past/Self-confidence/Professional Collaboration.
Fairman & Mackenzie (2015)	To explore ways through which teachers lead tasks with colleagues and improve teaching, learning, and understanding of their work as leaders in the US context.	In-depth interviews	24 elementary and high school teachers	12	Professional relationships/ Informal collaboration/ Trust/ Collegiality.

Taken from Shah, S. R. (2016, p. 85). Teacher leadership: A case study of teacher leaders' professional development in an EFL institute of a Saudi Arabian university.

The above matrix indicates the chronological order of published studies from 2007 to 2015. Although the first column on the left shows only authors' names, researchers can include keywords from the title of a study to make it more explicit. Having completed the chart or table, researchers can analyze various trends, similarities, and contradictions in the literature, which help them establish a theoretical framework for their own research. In addition, this can be an impressive way of critiquing, summarizing and presenting research studies on a particular topic. In relation to the above matrix, a thorough example of a critical summary would be:

As it can be seen, most of the studies reviewed in this section were conducted in the UK or US contexts, thus highlighting the significance of teacher leadership development in western contexts and revealing the dearth of research on this issue in EFL/ESL settings. It is worth noting that these eleven studies were in the orbit of the interpretive paradigm considering the subjective meanings and understandings of individuals in teacher leadership roles. The researchers' chosen methodologies, such as case study, narrative inquiry, ethnography, mixed-method and grounded theory were in line with their constructivist paradigmatic stance that they adopted. Since they aimed to explore and understand the perceptions and lived experiences of teacher leaders about their leadership development, they employed qualitative data collection tools, such as semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, reflective journals, and observations. Although these studies were carried out in different educational settings, the qualitative data collection methods yielded results that were largely very similar. The common factors that facilitated teacher leader learning were the individuals' efficacy, exposure to leadership roles, collaborative practices, critical incidents, powerful learning experiences, the influence of significant people, reflective practices, interactive activities, and mentoring. The findings of these studies are significant for various reasons. Firstly, it is obvious that teacher leaders were mainly experiential learners who had the ability to reflect on and give meaning to their role-based experiences. Secondly, their collaborative activities, the impact of mentorship and the influence of significant people show that they were operating in PLCs which contributed to their context-specific learning. Finally, it is interesting to note that these eleven studies have not found leadership knowledge important for teacher leadership roles. (Shah, 2016, p. 72-3)

The above summary is concise and succinct in nature which shows the author's understanding of the existing studies on the topic of teacher leadership in various contexts around the world. It evidently shows the contexts of the studies, their time frames, key findings and a dearth of research in a particular context. Moreover, the author points out similarities and common trends in the methodological foundations and data collection tools used in the cited studies, which contribute to his chosen research methodology and methods. As the aim of this matrix synthesis is to summarize, present effectively and facilitate readers to comprehend the theoretical foundations of a research study, students can use such tables or charts for the purpose of their doctoral and master's theses and dissertations.

Writing a Critical Literature Review

Research students are often asked to be critical while citing different sources, however, being critical is not an easy job for novice researchers. Irrespective of the field or discipline, researchers are expected to read and evaluate empirical and theoretical research in order to show its appropriateness and relevance to their own

study. This critical evaluation should be reflected in writing a summary of the text(s). While selecting research studies or papers, they should keep their research questions and methods in mind and indicate how the chosen papers inform their research study. This approach will allow them to be more critical of others' works, which is a very important aspect of a literature review. Aveyard (2014) has concisely described this point:

Critical appraisal of each individual research paper is therefore very important and will enable you to make assessments as to the relevance of the paper to your study, in addition to identifying the strengths and limitations – and therefore the impact – that the paper will have on addressing your research question. In short, at this point in your literature review, you need to examine carefully all of the information you have identified for relevance to your research question and quality of information provided. (Aveyard, 2014, p. 76)

As a critical appraisal of published work is a significant part of the literature review, it is important to understand this concept. Aveyard (2014) believes that “a critical appraisal is a structured process of examining a piece of research in order to determine its strengths and limitations, and therefore the weight it should have in your literature review” (p. 78). In other words, all published papers should be evaluated in light of your research study to demonstrate their relevance. This process should start at the note-taking and summarizing stage that will enable the researchers to draw on critique when writing the final draft of the literature review.

Critical reading, as discussed in section 3.1 is key to an effective literature review. To write critically, Ridley (2012) suggests that researchers should logically present their arguments that would relate to their conclusions. More importantly, critical reading should offer solid and logic to support their argument. It should also be used to assess, choose, organize and classify theories and research findings to establish a coherent foundation that would form the basis of their empirical research (Ridley, 2012).

While referring to others' work, supporting your own assertion, comparing various studies, critiquing different aspects of published papers, researchers should adopt different strategies suggested by Hart (1998) which include:

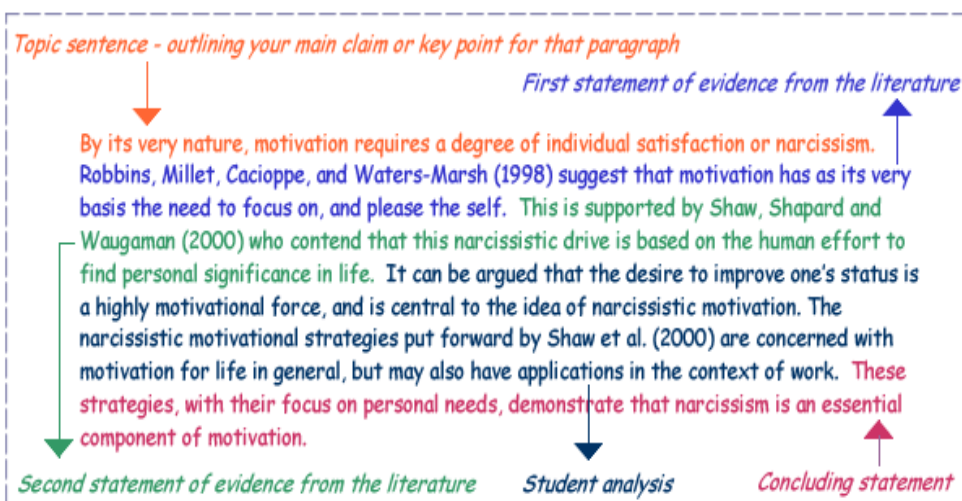
- Comparing and contrasting different theories, perspectives, concepts and terminology from the related literature and indicating the position you are taking for your own research;
- Strategic and selective referencing to support the underpinning arguments which form the basis of your research;
- Synthesizing arguments from two or more sources to create a new or more developed point of view;
- Agreeing with, confirming or defending a finding or point of view through an analysis of its merits and limitations;
- Conceding that an existing point of view has some strengths but qualifying your support of the position by highlighting certain weaknesses;

- Rejecting a point of view and giving reasons for the rejection, e.g. fallacies in the argument or research. (in Ridley 2012, p. 143)

In addition, Aveyard (2014, p. 87-90) encourages students and researchers to ask themselves the following questions while critically appraising a research study for the purpose of writing a literature review chapter. Answers to these questions will aid a critical view of a literature review chapter.

- What is the journal of publication? (Assessing its quality, relevance, impact factor)
- What is the research question and why was the study conducted? (Rationale, significance, and contribution of the study)
- How big was the sample? (Description of research population)
- Has the appropriate sample been obtained? (in line with the methodological nature of the study, i.e. quantitative and qualitative)
- How were the data gathered? (Methods, tools & procedures)
- How were the data analyzed? (Use of statistical or analytical software) (Aveyard, 2014, p. 87-90)

Although students are encouraged to be critical throughout the literature review chapters while citing and evaluating others' work, this may not be very necessary for the introductory part of the chapter as most of the arguments are made to set the scene for the literature review. However, it is suggested that researchers adopt a critical approach to reviewing, reading and writing at the very beginning to produce a good piece of a literature review demonstrating coherence between paragraphs and developing a logical argument. As integrating various arguments in a paragraph can be a difficult task, a graduate student should take great care while writing a well-integrated paragraph. A good critical paragraph will assimilate various similar and contrasting views from different authors. However,



it will also include the researchers's opinion, analysis, and understanding of the issue. The following paragraph is a good illustration of that:

Taken from "Literature review (n.d).Study and Learning Center. RMT University.

Researcher's Voice in the Literature Review

It is not only a critical approach that enables students to produce a rich literature review: his/her own voice and presence in writing also makes a profound impact on the overall quality of work. The researcher's voice refers to his/her assertive presence in the dissertation or thesis by presenting his/her case in a convincing manner. According to Ridley (2012, p. 158), researchers can take control and lead the readers through the content of the text by making their own assertions with the support of appropriate citations and references. They can also make their positions explicit by showing their understanding of the research material and incorporating it into their work.

The researcher's voice shows his/her understanding of the reviewed materials. The presentation of identical or contrasting ideas in literature and initiating a new debate brings the researcher's voice to the fore, which makes it an interesting read. On the other hand, if students just include authors' statements one after another, that will not highlight the significance of the topic in the context of their research. Therefore, the researcher's voice should be explicit in demonstrating his position in the research and to highlight various aspects of source materials. Ridley (2012) states that a generic statement or the researcher's own point of view should be followed by relevant references from the literature. She elucidates that for researchers, an efficient way of foregrounding their voice is to make clear and straightforward statements which are not referenced to other sources. These statements, which are purely their own should be followed by others' perspectives, information or findings in order to explain, elaborate and support the researcher's own stance.

Another effective way of foregrounding the researcher's voice is to make use of personal pronouns, 'I' and 'we', a useful technique that helps researchers to affirm their presence and assert their identity in the literature review chapter (Ridley, 2012). However, academic advisors, thesis supervisors, and examiners in different disciplines have diverse opinions regarding the use of personal pronouns and students in various contexts are often asked to use or avoid them according to the academic writing norms in a specific context. Despite a lack of consensus, Ridley considers them a powerful means for researchers to make their presence felt in a research study. She summarizes various sources and points out a number of purposes of personal pronouns. According to her, personal pronouns can help explain research activities of researchers. It can offer insights into how researchers have organized and structured the text. Moreover, it assists the researchers to explain their results or findings and share their personal reflections or experiences

of the research process. Last, but not least, it is an opportunity for researchers to present their point of views in an assertive manner (Ridley 2012, p. 164).

It is worth mentioning that the use of personal pronouns is less common in scientific research where researchers often analyze, measure and describe activities and procedures. However, in social science and humanities researchers often make use of 'I' and 'we' with a purpose in mind to state their position or present their viewpoint in a more direct way and avoid ambiguity (Ridley, 2012, p. 163). These verbs are commonly used when researchers conduct research studies in interpretive paradigm and adopt methodologies, such as ethnography, phenomenology, narrative inquiry and autobiography. The use of personal pronouns also helps researchers to establish a strong connection between the research and the researchers. The ownership of research and its contribution to knowledge are important facets of academic research, which encourages researchers to take responsibility for the role, impact, and consequences of their findings in a particular context.

Conclusion

This paper has considered the graduate students' and novice academic researchers' most common problem of writing a comprehensive, critical and relevant literature review chapter as part of their theses and dissertations. As this paper illustrates the significance, meaning, and purpose of the literature review chapter for a thesis, it also suggests how to read, take notes and summarize in order to review published research on a topic. Moreover, it proposes four steps to write a critical literature review; a) critical reading and note-taking, b) writing a summary of reviewed literature, c) the organization of literature review, and d) the use of a synthesis matrix. Although we have attempted to draw on key phases of writing a literature review in this paper, authors and writers in various disciplines should continue exploring ways and strategies to address the academic writing needs of researchers both in scientific fields as well as social sciences and humanities.

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