Critical Review of Literature

MMBA 8109: Research Methods
Learning outcomes

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- Understand the importance and purpose of the critical literature review.
- Adopt a critical perspective in your reading.
- Be aware of the range of literature sources available.
- Understand what is meant by plagiarism.
- Evaluate the relevance, value and adequacy of literature.
Introduction

• The assessment criteria requires you to demonstrate the ability to use published and other sources critically (Research Guide p. 48).
• You need to demonstrate awareness of the current state of knowledge in your subject, its limitations and how your research fits within this wider context ("situating your study").
Introduction

• The significance of your research and your findings will be evaluated in relation to other people’s research and their findings.
• You need to demonstrate knowledge of the key **theories, concepts and ideas** in your field as well as the major issues and debates about your topic.
Introduction

• Business and management research uses a wide range of literature: finance, marketing, human resource management, strategic management, entrepreneurship etc.

• It also involves multiple disciplines such as economics, psychology, sociology and geography.
Definition

• A critical literature review is a constructively critical analysis that develops a clear argument about what the published literature indicates is known and not known about your research question.

• It is NOT a compilation of all the readings you have done on the topic. Neither is it a mere patchwork of authors (He said-She said).
Definition

• The critical literature review should include both theoretical research and empirical research that supports your ideas. It should also include research that opposes those ideas.
Purpose of the literature review

• To help refine your research questions further.
• To highlight research possibilities that have been overlooked in research to date (*research gap*).
• To discover explicit recommendations for further research. This can provide a strong justification for your research.
• To avoid repeating work that has been done already.
Purpose of the literature review

• To gain an insight into what is considered important and relevant to the industry.
• To discover and provide an insight into research approaches, strategies and techniques that may be appropriate to your own research questions and objectives.
Adopting a critical perspective

Ask yourself **five** critical questions:

1. Why am I reading this?
2. What is the author trying to do in the article?
3. What is the author saying that is relevant to what I want to find out?
4. How convincing is the author’s argument?
   - Is it justified by the evidence?
5. What use can I make of the reading?
Adopting a critical perspective

• You need to be **willing to question** what you read.
  – This means constantly reviewing and justifying your own position with clear arguments and references to the literature rather than giving your own opinion.

• **Thesis = a sustained argument supported with evidence.**
Adopting a critical perspective

• You need to **read widely** on your research topic.
  – You need to identify the most relevant and significant theories and recognized experts.
  – For some topics, there will be a pre-existing, clearly developed theoretical base.
  – For other topics, you need to integrate several different theoretical strands to develop your understanding.
Adopting a critical perspective

• You must demonstrate a good understanding of the topic and the literature.
• The assessment criteria include the ability to justify:
  – The significance of the problem;
  – The methods and techniques applied;
  – The analyses, descriptions and explanations presented.
Structure of a literature review

• Start at a general level before narrowing down to your specific research objectives (Funnel).
• Provide a brief overview of key ideas and themes.
• Summarize, compare and contrast the research of the key authors. Do this per theme.
• Highlight the most relevant previous research.
Structure of a literature review

• Provide a detailed account of the findings of this research and show how they are related to your own research.
• Highlight those aspects (‘gaps’) where your own research will provide fresh insights.
• Guide the reader into subsequent sections of your project report (use your research questions as guideposts).
Sources of literature

• Main sources of literature (importance)


2. Books (*recognized experts and theories*)

3. Professional journals e.g. *Banking, Auditing fields.*

4. Trade journals/magazines e.g. *The Economist.* *Tend to be online and subscription-based.*

5. Reports from established organizations e.g. *KIPPRA Reports*
Sources of literature

• Main sources of literature (importance)

  6. Conference proceedings (*thematic areas e.g. Public-Private Partnerships*)

  7. Newspapers (*beware of possible bias in reporting and coverage*)

  8. MBA Dissertations (*Abstracts available through Indexes*)
Sources of literature

- Tertiary sources of literature
  - Databases e.g. Social Science Research Network
    - SSRN is the Number 1 Open Access Repository in the World (July 2012).
  - Catalogues
  - Encyclopedias
  - Dictionaries
  - Bibliographies
  - Citation indexes
Evaluating the literature

Assessing Relevance

• How recent is this item? *(10-year rule of thumb)*
• How closely related are the research objectives/questions to your own?
• Has this item been cited by other authors who have provided useful references?
• Does the item support/contradict your proposition?
Evaluating the literature

Assessing Value

• Does the item appear to be biased? *(Illogical argument, emotional language, selective reporting)*

• Does the item use appropriate theories?

• Does the item demonstrate methodological rigour? *E.g. sample selection, data collection, data analysis.*

• What is the quality of the reasoning and conclusions?
Evaluating the literature

Assessing Adequacy

• How authoritative is the literature cited?
• Are the main writers in the field cited?
• Do further searches provide references of items you have already read?
Poor Literature Reviews

• A lack of organization and structure.
• A lack of focus and coherence indicating the topic and objectives have not been clearly defined.
• Too repetitive and verbose instead of being incisive in description and critique of the literature.
• A failure to cite influential research in the field under investigation.
Poor Literature Reviews

• A failure to outline recent developments in the field under investigation.
• A failure to critically evaluate cited research thereby providing a mere description rather than a review.
• Citing irrelevant research because there is no focus to the intended research.
• An over dependence on a limited number of literature sources.
Poor Literature Reviews

• An over-use of web-based references and hence the danger of using literature of dubious quality.

(Source: Gill & Johnson, 2010: 35)
Tips in writing a literature review

1. Start exploring the literature early in the process (Google Scholar, Strathmore e-Library).
2. Organize your reading and your writing according to the research objectives.
3. Write regularly and develop a synthesis of ideas from the reading.
4. Do not wait to read all the literature before you start writing. Avoid procrastination!
Tips in writing a literature review

5. Develop a system to manage your references from the beginning.

6. Familiarize yourself with the APA Style of Referencing (Saunders et al., 2012: 656)

7. Work with progressive targets and reward yourself with every achievement.
Plagiarism

• Plagiarism is presenting work or ideas as if they are your own when in reality they are the work or ideas of someone else. It also includes the failure to acknowledge the original source (Saunders et al., 2012).

• Plagiarism violates the values of honesty and respect of others and reflects unethical behaviour.
Common forms of Plagiarism

• Copying whole/sections of a paper without proper acknowledgement.
• Submitting a paper written by someone else and passing it off as your own.
• Leaving out quotation marks from direct quotes giving the impression the material has been paraphrased rather than directly quoted.
• Paraphrasing without providing appropriate documentation.