Literature Reviews: An Introduction

Presenter: Vanessa van der Ham
National Centre for Teaching and Learning
Literature Review: An Examination of the Key Research on a Topic

Seeks to answer the following questions:

• What have others said about this topic?
• What theories address the topic?
• Which policies address the topic? (If relevant)
• What research has been done previously on the topic?
• Do the results of the existing research agree with one another, or is there disagreement?
• What are the gaps in the existing literature?

(Adapted from Davidson & Tollich, 1990)
Different uses of literature review in assignments

- Review leading to research questions/hypotheses
- Review leading to conclusions on the topic (and recommendations)
- Review leading to new or adapted theoretical model or framework for new model
The story structure of research:

- There’s this important problem or issue...
- and researchers understand some areas of the problem but others need more research
- a specific area requiring more research is this...and it’s important because...
- so what we did was...
- and found that....
- which means we now know this...
- and these are the implications of this new knowledge for addressing the problem/issue.

(Adapted from Paltridge & Starfield, 2007)
Provide the reader with a context/setting for your research
General problem requiring attention and evidence of significance of problem

Narrow down to specific aspect of the problem under investigation
Your specific topic area – what does the research say about its connection with the problem?

Critical overview of existing research in your specific topic area
What do we already know from existing research?
Which aspects require further research?
- what are the gap(s) in the research?

Therefore

How your study fills the research gap(s)
Objectives of your research
Review leading to research question(s)

Previous research on the topic

- Theories
- Studies
- Reviews

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{What was studied?} \\
&\text{How was it studied?} \\
&\text{Findings?}
\end{align*}
\]

Comparison of findings

- Areas of agreement
- Areas of disagreement

Contribution of the research

Limitations of the research

Gap(s) in the research

How your study addresses the gap(s)

Positions your own research in the context of previous research on the topic

Creates a space for your research

Justifies your topic and your methodology
Review leading to conclusions on topic

Previous research on the topic

- Theories
- Studies
- Reviews

\{ \begin{align*}
& \text{What was studied?} \\
& \text{How was it studied?} \\
& \text{Findings?}
\end{align*} \}

- Comparison of findings
- Areas of agreement
- Areas of disagreement

- Contribution of the research
- Limitations of the research
- Gap(s) in the research

Conclusions (Recommendations)

Critical overview of research on the topic

Provides reader with informed and supported conclusions on the topic
Review leading to new/adapted theoretical model

Previous research on the topic

- Theories  \( \text{What was studied?} \)
- Studies  \( \text{How was it studied?} \)
- Reviews  \( \text{Findings?} \)

Comparison of findings
- Areas of agreement
- Areas of disagreement

Contribution of previous models
Limitations of previous models
Way forward

New/adapted model or framework for new model

Critical overview of theoretical models and new research on topic

Situates and justifies new/adapted model
How is a literature review organised?

• by key themes or findings
• arranged in headings and sub-headings
• as an argument that flows
  - information from various sources is synthesised to form a coherent argument
Organised by key themes or findings

**Topic:** What are the most effective measures to prevent smoking onset amongst adolescents?

**Restrictions on tobacco advertising**
- Tobacco advertising and smoking initiation
- Effectiveness of banning advertising
- Alternative forms of tobacco promotion

**Restrictions on sales to adolescents**
- Age limits
- Restricting sales to tobacconists only

**Product regulation**
- Labelling
- Ban on small packaging

**Health education**
- Mass-media campaigns targeted at youth
- Smoking prevention programmes in schools

(Source: Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007)
Synthesise information on existing research

A literature review is not just a collection of summaries:

- Research by Smith (2005)
- Research by Atken (2007)
Synthesise information on existing research on the topic

Where is your voice here? What is the point you’re making about the topic in this paragraph? Which issue does the research highlight?

Research by Brown (2002)

Where is your voice here? What is the relationship between Brown’s research and Smith’s research?

Research by Smith (2005)

Where is your voice here? What is the relationship between Atken’s research and that of Brown and of Smith?

Research by Atken (2007)

How are all these linked to your research question?
Synthesise existing research on topic

**Correlates of Burnout**

Correlates of burnout can be grouped into three major categories: individual (or personal), job, and organisational...

**Individual Level Correlates**

Demographic variables (such as gender and age) represent examples of variables studied at the individual level. Gender has been frequently investigated as a correlate of burnout, although findings for this variable are varied. Although there are some studies showing that burnout occurs more often among women than among men (Bussing & Perrar, 1991; Maslach & Jackson, 1998b; Poulin & Walter, 1993a), the opposite is also found (Price & Spence, 1994; Van Horn et al., 1997)...

Age is the most consistent factor related to burnout (Birch et al., 1986; Mor & Laliberte, 1984; Poulin & Walter, 1993a)...

(Adapted from Whitehead, 2001, pp. 38-39)
Critiquing existing research on the topic

What are the strengths and limitations of the existing research in relation to your topic?

- Contributions to the topic area
- Limitations in terms of the topic area
- What are the gaps in the research?

You’re constructing an argument about previous research on the topic
Despite the abundance of definitions and theories of burnout, there is still lacking a comprehensive theoretical framework for burnout, due to the complexity of the phenomenon (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998)...

The amount of qualitative research on teacher’s work stress is limited. Two studies by Blase (1986) and Ianni and Reuss-Ainni (1978) will be discussed below...

- Identify strengths & limitations in relation to your research
- You are constructing an **argument** about gaps in current knowledge
  - **your voice** must come through clearly in the review
Identify gaps in the research

**Using negative openings:**

However, little information  
little data  
little research  
However, few studies  
  few researchers  
  few attempts

**Using contrastive statements:**

The research has tended to focus on..., rather than on...
However, much of the attention has been focused on X rather than Y.

**Raising questions, hypotheses or needs**

If these results could be confirmed, they would provide strong evidence for...
It would seem, therefore, that further investigations are needed in order to...

Recommended: Manchester University’s *Academic phrasebank* (2018):
Google: [manchester university + academic phrasebank](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=manchester+university+academic+phrasebank)
Existing knowledge on your topic: What do you include?

- Critical evaluation of existing knowledge
- Major issues and debates
- Trends in the research
- Origins and definitions of the topic
- Theories about the topic
- Main questions and problems that have been addressed

(Adapted from Hart, 1998)
Teacher Burnout: A Study of Occupational Stress and Burnout in New Zealand Schools

2.1. The Nature of Stress
2.2. History of the Stress Concept
2.3. Main Approaches to Definitions of Stress
2.4. The Stimulus Based Definition
2.5. The Response Based Definition
2.6. Summary of Response and Stimulus Approaches
2.7. The Transactional or Interactional Definition of Stress
2.8. The Burnout Concept
2.9. Defining Burnout
2.10. Cherniss’s Model of Burnout
2.11. Golebiewski’s Model of Burnout
2.12. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory
2.13. Conceptual Framework
2.14. Measurement of Burnout
2.15. Correlates of Burnout
2.16. Studies on Teacher Stress and Burnout
2.17. Conclusion
Example:
In order to study stress in teachers, a clear understanding of what is meant by the term ‘stress’ is needed…The word stress has become a word commonly used in a variety of settings, with different meanings attached to the situation in which it is used. Selye (1956), one of the pioneers in the field…

There are, however, three general perspectives which have been identified. One is that stress is the result of something outside of the individual, i.e., external factors are the cause of stress; the second is that stress is internal, it is what goes on inside the individual as they interpret or react to what is going on around them (Gold & Roth, 1993); and the third major perspective is the transactional view of Lazarus and colleagues which focuses on the cognitive processes and emotional reactions of individuals to stress in their environment (Lazarus, 1978)

(Adapted from Whitehead, 2001, pp. 12-16)
Introducing theoretical models

...Maslach and Jackson (1981) conceptualised burnout as having three core components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and lack of, or reduced, personal accomplishment. Maslach’s model of burnout characterises emotional exhaustion as feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one’s emotional resources. Maslach (1998) cites major sources of this exhaustion as work overload and personal conflict at work. Depersonalisation refers to a negative, cynical or excessively detached response to other people, which often includes a loss of idealism. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in feelings of competence and productivity at work.

The above three-component conceptualisation is the most widely accepted model of burnout (O’Driscoll & Cooper, 1996)...

(Adapted from Whitehead, 2001, pp. 27-28)
Despite the popularity of the stimulus approach, the stimulus model is not without its limitations. One is that stimulus events alone may be insufficient when predicting an individual’s response. For example, two teachers subjected to loud, noisy classrooms may show quite different levels of strain, or may show strain at different times. Thus it fails to take account of individual differences, and it ignores the perceptual cognitive processes which underpin such differences (Cox & Fergusson, 1991).

Another criticism of this approach is that…

(Adapted from Whitehead, 2001, p. 16)
Discussing trends in the research

In the last few decades, research on stress has broadened and become influenced largely by behavioural scientists, moving away from the strict focus on physical stimuli and their physiological consequences (Travers & Cooper, 1996). There has also been a shift of orientation from physical stressors...toward...

(Whitehead, 2001, p. 15)

- When did your concept first start to appear in the literature?
- What was the focus of discussion/research at that time? Eg. Was it in a specific context?
- How has this changed over time?
- Current theory and research on the topic? - Strengths and limitations
Concluding the review

From this overview of teacher stress and burnout, some important considerations emerge. Firstly, findings from biographical/demographic characteristics in relation to stress and burnout are not conclusive. Also, the review provides predominantly quantitative, empirically based studies, with very few findings coming from interpretive or narrative study. Apart from Friedman’s (1991), Blase’s (1996) and Ianni and Reuss-Ianni’s (1978) study, there has been limited research using qualitative methods encouraging free expression of teacher’s personal meanings associated with work stress and burnout.

While studies list factors that contribute to stress and burnout, it is clear that understanding the complexity of burnout in schools is required to give deeper insight into the problem.

(Therefore this research...)
Deciding which literature is most pertinent to your review

Library searching - Electronic and hard copies:

- university databases
- use **abstracts** to help you in your search
- which authors and articles/books are cited most?
- make an appointment with a librarian for a research consultation

*Make sure you follow guidelines in Course Guides for requirements*
Prioritise material type

Peer reviewed

1. Articles in refereed, international journals
2. Books / Chapters in Ed. Books
3. Articles in national, refereed journals
4. Conference papers / Research reports (govt, com, org)
5. PhD thesis
6. MA thesis
7. Honours thesis
8. Websites / Articles in non-refereed journals

• Check course requirements
• Consult with your supervisor
Presenting information and analysis

A range of formats can be used:

- Text
- Tables
- Diagrams

- Consult with your supervisor on appropriate formats
- See Emerson & Hampton, Chapter 9
- Examine other literature reviews
- Create **templates** according to the requirements of your course
  - presentation and referencing of texts, tables and diagrams
  - in-text references to texts, tables and diagrams
Help with literature review

• One-to-one & small group consultations at NCTL:
  Contact details: Email: ctlalb@massey.ac.nz

• Massey’s OWLL site

• Recommended text on literature review (available in the Library):

• Recommended for students in the sciences (available in the Library):
References


