Quadrant II – Notes

Programme: Bachelor of Arts

Subject: History

Course Code: HSS 104

Course Title: Introduction to Research Skills in History

Unit: Research Process

Module Name: Literature review, formulation of hypothesis, research design.

Module No: 4

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Notes :

Literature review

The literature review is an integral part of the research process and makes a valuable contribution to almost every operational step. In the initial stages of research it helps us to establish the theoretical roots of our study, clarifies our ideas and develops our research methodology.

Later in the process, the literature review serves to enhance and consolidate our own knowledge base and helps us to integrate our findings with the existing body of knowledge. While conducting research we need to compare our findings with those of others, it is here that the literature review plays an extremely important role.

During the write-up of our report it helps us to integrate our findings with existing knowledge – that is, to either support or contradict earlier research.

In relation to our own study, the literature review can help in four ways. It can: bring clarity and focus to our research problem; improve our research methodology; broaden our knowledge base in our research area; and contextualise our findings.

How to review the literature?

four steps involved in conducting a literature review:

1. Searching for the existing literature in your area of study,2. Reviewing the selected literature,3. Developing a theoretical framework, 4. Developing a conceptual framework.

1. Searching for the existing literature in your area of study.

To search effectively for the literature in our field of enquiry, we need to have at least some idea of the broad subject area and of the problem we wish to investigate, in order to set parameters for our search compile a bibliography for this broad area. There are three sources that we can use to prepare a bibliography: A)books; B) journals; C)the Internet.

2. Reviewing the selected literature.

The next step is to start reading them critically to pull together themes and issues that are of relevance to our study. If we don't have a theoretical framework of themes in mind to start with, we should use separate sheets of paper for each theme or issue we identify as we go through selected books and articles. The next step is to start reading them critically to pull together themes and issues that are of relevance to our study. Now, all that remains to be done is to write about the literature we have reviewed

3. Developing a theoretical framework.

The content of our literature review should reflect a theoretical background of our study and enable us to contextualise our findings in relation to the existing body of knowledge in addition to refining our methodology. In order to fulfil the theoretical background of our study purpose, we should identify and describe various theories relevant to our field; and specify gaps in existing knowledge in the area recent advances in the area of study, current trends and so on.

While reading the literature for theoretical background of our study, we will realise that certain themes have emerged. List the main ones, converting them into subheadings.These subheadings should be precise, descriptive of the theme in question and follow a logical progression.

Now, under each subheading, record the main findings with respect to the theme in question (thematic writing), highlighting the reasons for and against an argument if they exist, and identifying gaps and issues.

4. Developing a conceptual framework.

The second broad function of the literature review – contextualising the findings of our study – requires us to compare very systematically our findings with those made by others. Quote from these studies to show how our findings contradict, confirm or add to them. It places our findings in the context of what others have found out providing complete reference in an acceptable format.

Formulation of Hypothesis

The second important consideration in the formulation of a research problem is the construction of a hypothesis. Hypotheses brings clarity, specificity and focus to a research problem, within the context of a research study, we can construct as many hypotheses as we consider to be appropriate.

A hypothesis is an assumption, suspicion, assertion or an idea about a phenomenon, relationship or situation, the reality or truth of which we do not know. A researcher calls these assumptions, assertions, statements or hypotheses and they become the basis of an enquiry. In most studies the hypothesis will be based upon either previous studies or our own or someone else's observations.

Guidelines to bear in mind while formulating hypothesis

1. **A hypothesis should be simple, specific and conceptually clear**

We should avoid ambiguity in the construction of a hypothesis, as ambiguity will make the verification of our hypothesis almost impossible. It should be 'uni-dimensional' – that is, it should test only one relationship at a time.To be able to develop a good hypothesis we must be familiar with the subject area (the literature review is of immense help). The more insight we have into a problem, the easier it is to construct a hypothesis.

2. **A hypothesis should be capable of verification**

Methods and techniques must be available for data collection and analysis. There is no point in formulating a hypothesis if it cannot be subjected to verification because there are no techniques to verify it. However, this does not necessarily mean that we should not formulate a hypothesis for which there are no methods of verification. We might, in the process of doing our research, develop new techniques to verify it.

3. **A hypothesis should be related to the existing body of knowledge**

It is important that our hypothesis emerges from the existing body of knowledge, and that it adds to it**.**

4. A hypothesis should be operationalisable

This means that it can be expressed in terms that can be measured. If it cannot be measured, it cannot be tested and, hence, no conclusions can be drawn

Research design

A research design is a plan, structure and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions or problems. The plan is the complete programme of the research. It includes an outline of what the investigator will do from writing the hypotheses and their operational implications to the final analysis of data.

Through a research design we decide for ourselves and communicate to others our decisions regarding what study design we propose to use, how we are going to collect information from our respondents, how we are going to select our respondents, how the information we are going to collect is to be analysed and how we are going to communicate our findings.

In presenting our rationale and justification we need to support them critically from the literature reviewed. We also need to assure ourselves and others that the path we have proposed will yield valid and reliable results. Hence through a research design we: conceptualise an operational plan to undertake the various procedures and tasks required to complete our study; ensure that these procedures are adequate to obtain valid, objective and accurate answers to the research questions.

In brief, research design must, contain—

(a) a clear statement of the research problem;

(b) procedures and techniques to be used for gathering information;

(c) the population to be studied;

and (d) methods to be used in processing and analysing data.