

**LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH FINDINGS IN
SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES: A STUDY OF
SELECTED UNDERGRADUATE PROJECTS IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA 2008/2009 SESSION**

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Abstract

Literature review and research findings are two of the important elements in every social research report. The literature review enables the researcher to showcase past efforts on the current research and how the current research differs from the past. Research findings on the other hand are the outcome of the researcher's efforts in providing solutions to research problem(s). This paper examines the two sections as a continuum activity in social research with a view to identifying the logical and philosophical connections between them. The paper utilized secondary data in its investigation, and content analysis in data analysis. The paper argues that, an open-minded, and comprehensive but relevant literature review would show the researcher the essential variables which must be observed in the resolution of research problems. Besides, it also enriches the ability of the researcher in providing systematic and coherent interpretation of research findings. Undergraduates projects were randomly selected from Departments in the faculties of Management, and Social Sciences of the University of Abuja. While a few of undergraduates projects examined demonstrated genuine efforts in the literature review, in most cases the research findings are not connected with issues generated in the review. It is recommended among others that research lecturers and supervisors should bring the attention of their students to the nexus between these two independent, but interrelated aspect of social research report.

Key words: Literature Review, Research findings, Social Research.

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Introduction

Research occupies a prime position in human society. It is one of the vehicles for knowledge formation and development. It also plays a crucial role in the advancement and transmission of knowledge. Indeed, all the major achievements in human society be it scientific, technology and otherwise were due to unrelenting efforts of researchers. Muhammad (2005:1), shared this opinion as he notes that, “the transformation in human conditions is a product of advancement in research, which results in discovery in various fields”. Put differently, the findings, outcomes, and discoveries of researchers and their recommendations have been useful in helping man to deal with social, economic, political and environmental problems and challenges which confront the human society from time to time. Hence, the usefulness and indispensability of research in human society is due to its findings and discoveries which help in unravelling mysteries in our environment.

Therefore, any research endeavour which is unable to improve the frontiers of knowledge, or offer findings capable of unravelling puzzling situation is not worthy of being called research, especially in the academic world. However, there are a number of factors which enable research to achieve this feat of improving the frontiers of knowledge with appropriate findings. Among such factors is the literature review section of social sciences research. In other words, literature review is an important determinant of whether a research’s findings would be relevant to his research problems or not. It also determines the usefulness or otherwise of the findings of a research. This paper examines the relationship between literature review and research findings in social science with a view to determining the adequacy or otherwise of the practises among the undergraduate students in social sciences.

The paper is divided into 7 sections, namely; the introduction, objectives of the paper, methodology of the paper, conceptual analysis, the nexus between literature review and research findings, content analysis of selected undergraduate projects; and conclusion and recommendations.

Objectives of the Paper

The objectives of this paper are to:

- i. examine the relationships between literature review and research findings in social sciences;

- ii. show the significance of literature review in enhancing research findings;
- iii. identify the challenges of undergraduate researchers in reviewing relevant literature and reporting research findings;
- iv. offer recommendations on how undergraduate researchers can improve the usefulness of their research findings.

Methodology of the Paper

Data used for this study, were obtained through secondary source. These include randomly selected projects from the faculties of management and social sciences of the University of Abuja. Undergraduate projects were selected from Departments of Accounting, Public Administration, Economics, and Political Science. In each Department, ten projects were randomly selected as samples. Although, several projects have been submitted in these Departments, the samples was limited to only the projects submitted by undergraduate regular students in the 2008/2009 academic session.

Other sources of secondary data used are textbooks and journal articles. In the presentation and analysis of the data, content analysis approach was used.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Literature Review

Literature review has been defined variously. It is defined as a scholarly survey of articles, books and other sources that are relevant to a particular issue. Adedayo and Ajibade (2006:24), conceived it as “an intellectual excursion into the existing body of knowledge in one’s chosen topic of research”. Peter (2005:77), viewed literature review as the careful and critical revision of writings and collection of productions that exist on the phenomenon under review. These definitions show that literature review is a process of examining the previous works in one’s current endeavour. It is an adequate survey of the existing literature in the library or other sources that relate to one’s research work. This is based on the belief that, in every chosen research endeavours some level of documented knowledge already exist.

Literature review is often mistaken for conceptual definition. While literature review is closely related to conceptual definition, it is by no means limited to it. In this connection, Ngu observed that:

very often than not, research students are more inclined towards definition of concepts all in the name of literature review. The requirement here is much more than mere definition of concepts. What is required here is for the researcher to revisit and review other relevant previous works in the field of research ... (Ngu, 2005:223).

This is to say that, conceptual review or analysis is an aspect of literature review. Literature review, is, however broader and more inclusive. At the stage of conceptual analysis, the researcher is expected to examine different scholarly view points as regards the definition and meaning of concepts in his/her study. In addition to this, the researcher is to examine relevant and empirical works conducted in his area of study with a view to locating existing gaps in knowledge.

There are two broad forms of organising literature review. They are the thematic approach and chronological order (Obasi, 1999:104-105). In thematic approach, the reviewer organises issues on the basis of similarity or commonality of ideas. It can be done in such a way that sub-headings are used to cover related areas of the topic under investigation. The advantage of this method is that, the work is more organised and easier for others to understand. The chronological order on the other hand lays emphasis on dates, epochs or era within which existing works were carried out. This style enables a researcher to document the origin and development of a phenomenon under study. "The importance of this approach lies in its ability to contribute to an understanding of the cumulative knowledge existing in a particular area under study especially from a historical perspective (Obasi, 1995:105).

Regardless of the approach adopted (either thematic or chronological), literature review plays significant role in management and social science research. First, through the process of conceptual analysis, the researcher is able to transform concepts in his/her study to empirical terms. In other words, one major significance of literature review in management and social sciences is that in the process of conceptual analysis, the researcher transforms concepts (abstract) into concrete and measurable terms. Seeman (1972:25-32), illustrated this with the concept of alienation. To him, a proper conceptualisation of the concept attributed five meanings to alienation, which are:

1. **Powerlessness** – The expectation of individuals that their behaviour cannot bring about or influence the outcome they desire.

2. **Meaninglessness** – The perception by individuals that they do not understand decision made by others or events taking place around them.
3. **Normlessness** – The expectation that socially unacceptable behaviour (e.g. cheating) is now required to achieve certain goals.
4. **Isolation** – The feeling of separateness that comes from rejecting socially approved values and goals.
5. **Self-estrangement** – The denial of the image of the “self” as defined by the immediate group or society at large (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996:32).

From this conceptual definitions, the researcher is able to operationalize the concept of alienation by constructing a set of questionnaire items to measure the dimension which fits his/her research interest. This goes without saying that, conceptual analysis help the researcher in making concepts in the research topic observable and measurable. However, the researcher would have to go beyond conceptual analysis (as illustrated above), in the literature review. He would have to bring into perspective, empirical researches conducted in his area of research interest.

Secondly, a literature review according to Odigboh and Osuagwu (1978:41), enables a writer to obtain state-of-the art knowledge about development in a given subject matter. In other words, the review brings into perspective modern thinking and arguments on the subject matter of the research. Thus, it conveys to the researcher what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic and what their strengths and weaknesses are. Also, literature review helps broaden the researchers' horizon in terms of methodologies, findings and conclusion of previous works, and thereby improving his ability of dealing with current problems.

Concept of Research Findings

Research finding is otherwise known as result. Abdul-Maliq (2006:166), described research findings as outcome or explanations resulting from data analysed. It is the outcome of a study which serves to justify the undertaken of a research. Research findings are those facts which the researcher discovers as the solution to his/her research problems. Umar (2005:216), shared similar thought as he opines that:

In the results section of your report, you will finally get to talk about what you discovered, invented, or confirmed through your research and you will present your experimental data, observation and outcome.

This is why we can rightly observed that, results or findings are the hallmark of research. Without findings, the research becomes a fruitless endeavour. Besides, it is only in the light of result, vis-à-vis research problems/objectives, that the success or otherwise of research can be established. Thus every research must have certain findings on the basis of which its recommendations are built.

Also, research findings arise in different ways depending largely on the methodology adopted in obtaining data for the particular study. Therefore, while findings for a secondary data based research would emerge through descriptive approach, research findings for a primary data based would arise through analytical and statistical instruments. Regardless of the approach adopted in a research, however, the findings of a research must align with research problem(s). Failure of research findings to meet this condition renders not only the findings useless, but also the recommendations of such research, and by extension the entire research.

The Nexus Between Literature Review and Research Findings

The foregoing discussion has shown the meaning, approaches and significance of literature review, and research findings in the social science disciplines. However, it must be stress that there is logical connection between every section of a social research beginning from the introductory aspect up to the last part which usually contains the summary, conclusions and recommendations. In more specific terms, literature review, and research findings are not just different sections of a social science research which a researcher treats, there is symbiotic relationship between the two sections, the advantage of which the researcher must explore in order to have a useful research. The relationship between literature review and research findings include:

First, by transforming the concepts to observable and measurable variables in the course of conceptual analysis, the researcher is able to raise issues which are of direct relevance to the subject under study. This simplifies for him/her the task of developing his questionnaire or any other research instrument he wishes to use. For instance, a researcher who is working on the concept of alienation as cited above, can conveniently work more closely with any of the five conceptualisation which fits his/her interest. He can then raise questions relating to powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, or any other one as a way of establishing the

relevance or otherwise of alienation to his study group. In the same vein, for a researcher who have similar interest with the above instance but chooses to use secondary data as source of information, he can focus his attention more closely on such conceptualisation which he finds relevant.

Secondly, as noted earlier, another significance of literature review is that it help the researcher to know the state of art in his/her area of research. This knowledge sharpens the attention of the researcher in such a way that he avoids approaches which have been used in the past but with no result. And in the circumstances where he uses such techniques, appropriate remedies would be device such that his research is not made futile.

Thirdly, arising from the fact that the research findings are rooted in the literature review, the researcher is able to undertake critical analysis of such findings alongside their implications. The researcher is in a position to bring to the attention of his reader all sides to such issues and their effects. Fourth, and by the same token, where the researcher fails to undertake extensive review of relevant literature, he ends up raising issues which are of no relevance to the research in question. He may also replicate approaches which have proved unsuccessful in the past. Another implication of lack of adequate review of relevant literature to research findings is that the researcher is unable to offer strong interpretation of his research findings within the context of his/her research.

Content Analysis of Selected Undergraduate Projects.

From the sampled projects of undergraduates, the following trends are observed.

1. In most cases there was no systematic and coherent literature review on the subject matter of the research.
2. The literature review is narrow except for a few which were comprehensive. As a result of the narrow literature review, the horizon of the researchers on the subject matter were not widened.
3. Arising from the above, the researchers find it difficult to identify pertinent issues to be measured and observed at the observational level.
4. Thus, there were only partial contacts between the literature review and research findings.

5. Majority of the researchers (among cases examined) finds it difficult to undertake rigorous analysis and interpretation of their research findings.

The implication of the above trend is that, researcher either end up with no recommendations or provides irrelevant ones. This also means that, such researches have not made contribution to knowledge or are unable to resolve the problems which necessitated the study.

The major factor responsible for this situation is the failure of researchers to pay attention to their literature review and its inherent benefits. More often than not, undergraduates researchers carry out literature review as a ritual in research exercise, and not as avenue for knowing the fundamental issues pertaining their research topic. Another problem which contributes to poor attitude to literature review, and subsequently poor findings in social science research is the absence of encouragement for researchers from the public. The point here is that, if the findings and recommendations of previous researches were used by the appropriate authorities, the present day researchers will be challenged to make workable and logical findings from their researches. But situations in which research report are only used for the award of degree makes researchers to be comfortable with only satisfying the academic requirements; and thereby not minding whether their findings and recommendations are logically derived or not.

Conclusion

Research is an important activity in every human society. Its significance is not only because it enhance the frontiers of knowledge, but also because its findings help in resolving challenges and puzzling situations which confronts human society. Research may be either basic or applied depending on the purpose of undertaking the research. Basic research is usually conducted for the satisfaction of taste in knowledge, while applied research is designed to resolve a pressing problem. Social science research which may take the form of either of the two type are conducted in dealing with the investigation of social behaviour of man when faced with various socio-economic factors.

Literature review and research findings are two different aspect of social science research report which are expected to be given serious attention. While literature review is the process by which the researcher examines previous works and studies in his subject matter, research findings represent the outcome of research effort. The findings are the discoveries made by the current

researcher, and are the solution to the research problems. These two sections of a research report, are not just located in the structure of research report for the sake of it. They are interlinked and connected. The benefits of literature review in social science research goes beyond expanding the horizon and understanding of the researcher about the topic under investigation. It also directs the attention of the researcher to issues central to the resolution of research problems which help in sharpening the researcher observation skills. Indeed the originality and relevance of research findings is determined to a large extent by the adequacy and criticality of the literature review.

However, the current practices among undergraduates social researcher in the university system as depicted from the sampled projects is far from meeting the above stated condition. In most cases, the researchers undertook narrow literature review, and thus fail to establish contact with issues central to their research topic. While others are unable to offer rigorous analysis and interpretation of their research findings within the context of their research. The implication of these is that, such researches would not be very useful if they were to be applied to empirical situations, thereby leading to wasted efforts in the conduct of the research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the submissions of this paper with regards to the connectivity between literature review and research findings; and more importantly the need to improve the richness of research findings in social sciences, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Lecturers of research methodology in the University should bring the attention of students to the connections between literature review and research findings.
2. At the supervision stage, supervisees must be encouraged to undertake adequate and critical literature review in the relevant areas of research topic.
3. Researchers, especially in the social sciences must approach literature review with open mind, and readiness to know more about their research topic.
4. Also, the public (organisation of focus) needs to encourage social researchers by not only requesting for copies of research report, but by ensuring the implementation of the findings and recommendations of researches conducted on their organization.

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