



The Systematic Use of Previous Studies in Scientific Research

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ABSTRACT

Serious scientific research does not start from scratch; rather, it relies on a body of research and studies that form a solid foundation for any research or scientific study. Thus, previous studies are considered one of the most important tools that stimulate the mind and help generate new ideas.

The literature review and previous research provide researchers with an opportunity to examine what has been written on the topics they wish to explore, allowing them to approach the research in a new way, which aids in the development of a well-founded research problem. Previous studies are considered the most significant component of scientific research, regardless of its type (theses, dissertations, articles, etc.). Researchers benefit from previous studies during the process of selecting a research topic, throughout the stages of conducting the research, and when analyzing and reviewing the findings. This highlights the central role that previous studies play.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the importance of previous studies and to explore how they can be used and benefited from in scientific research.

Keywords: Previous studies, usage, scientific research.

Introduction

Relying on previous studies in scientific research reflects a belief in the logic of cumulative knowledge in science. Scientific research is a human cognitive activity that may encounter gaps, which is why, when establishing it, researchers need to draw upon the findings and efforts of others. Previous studies are thus considered the foundation upon which any scientific research should be based to achieve solid research results and offer well-established intellectual contributions.

Previous studies are not merely elements to be cited in the research problem and then forgotten; the goal is not to gather as many studies as possible and overcrowd the research with them. Rather, the primary purpose of incorporating these studies is to use them in ways that enrich the research both theoretically and methodologically. It is often observed in some graduate theses (Bachelor's, Master's, PhD) that previous studies are hardly utilized at all.

This paper will explore how to use previous studies, highlight the obstacles that hinder the proper use of these studies, and propose strategies to help students benefit from the selected studies related to their research topics.

1. Defining Concepts

1.1 Utilizing Previous Studies

This refers to the systematic and organized use of previous studies in the chapters of a thesis or dissertation, in a way that achieves the intended scientific benefit. The definition emphasizes the comprehensive nature of previous studies and how they should be used at every step of the research process in a structured and well-founded manner.

1.2 Previous Studies

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Previous studies refer to the research and studies conducted in the field that the researcher is considering. This includes dissertations and theses from both local and international universities, which are used as references in scientific research.

Maurice Angers asserts that previous research is an indispensable source of inspiration for researchers, as every study is an extension of the research that preceded it. The definitions suggest that previous studies are not exact replicas of the topics the researcher explores but are related to them and serve as valuable tools for brainstorming new research topics.

2. Importance of Previous Studies

The importance of previous studies can be summarized in the following points:

- Reviewing previous studies helps the researcher choose their topic wisely and avoids the difficulty of repeating previous research.
- It allows the researcher to become familiar with the challenges faced by other researchers and the main solutions they applied to overcome these obstacles.
- It provides the researcher with various references related to their research topic.
- It supplies the researcher with methodological tools and procedures.
- It enables the researcher to benefit from the results of previous studies and apply them to their own research.

3. Reviewing Previous Studies

The first and most important step in the research process is reviewing previous studies. This is not just a superficial browsing of what has been written about the topic but a thorough and deep investigation into the literature. A cursory glance may not allow the researcher to find studies directly related to their topic, and it could potentially overlook important studies that should serve as the foundation for their own work.

This process involves a detailed exploration that provides the researcher with a solid and fruitful understanding directly related to their topic. As researcher Abdel Nour Al-Lam notes, "Before beginning their research, the researcher needs to conduct an initial and exploratory reading and review the literature in their field of study comprehensively and deeply."

Given the difficulty of accessing everything written in the field of research and related areas, it is better to review the general topics that serve the purpose of the research, rather than trying to cover each individual study. This broader approach provides a foundational understanding, with more in-depth exploration of specific studies as the research progresses.

Fourth: Criteria for Selecting Previous Studies

- It is essential to access previous studies from their original sources and avoid secondary sources.
- Avoid previous studies that are not published in reputable and peer-reviewed journals or scientific publications.
- Avoid general studies that are not directly related to the research problem. In this context, Sayed Al-Hadidi states: "The more the references and studies consulted by the student address the same topic or are closely related to it, and are from reputable scientific centers, and the researchers are specialists, the more weight these studies will have when referenced."
- Avoid detailed and lengthy presentations of the selected studies.
- Avoid unsupported criticism or exaggerated evaluations of the content and results of these studies.
- Avoid older previous studies. "After ten years, a study is likely to have exhausted its objectives and results."

The researcher can provide justifications for studying the same topic by comparing its title, theoretical framework, objectives, methodology, and results. When including previous studies, the researcher should discuss them in detail, highlighting the fundamental differences."

Fifth: Classification of Previous Studies

There are several common classifications for previous studies, including:

1. Chronological classification (time-based).
2. Classification based on the primary variables of the research.
3. Classification based on the research questions or hypotheses.
4. Classification based on their proximity to the research, from closest to furthest.
5. Classification based on the results of these studies: supporting, opposing, or neutral to the current study.

Sixth: Utilizing Previous Studies

Utilizing previous studies is the result of several important stages that the researcher must complete with precision. These stages are summarized as follows:

1. Conducting a thorough search for studies similar to the research topic. The closer the study is to the research topic, the better. The search process should not be random; it requires considerable effort and a deep dive into the theoretical literature, referring to peer-reviewed publications. This stage also requires the

researcher to have a clear understanding of their research topic and objectives to select studies that will serve and enrich the research.

"As for the number of previous studies a researcher needs to review, this depends on the researcher's judgment and expertise, because reviewing all studies related to the research problem is not feasible due to the vast number of studies and scientific research."

One of the barriers to covering all studies related to the topic is the language barrier, as some of the most significant studies may be in foreign languages but still have considerable scientific value.

2. Reviewing previous studies and selecting the most relevant ones for the research topic. "Molly notes that reviewing the literature is a delicate and difficult task, requiring awareness, insight, and a deep understanding of the specialty within a broader context. This step is crucial as it reduces the risk of dead-end paths, rejected research, wasted effort, and trial-and-error by relying on methods proven effective by previous researchers."

Reviewing previous studies requires high-level skills from the researcher to retain key studies and read them critically. This process demands specialized intellectual resources and a conceptual sensitivity that enables the researcher to distinguish directly relevant concepts, avoiding confusion, especially in social sciences, where each concept carries a theoretical and ideological background.

3. Selecting the studies closest to the research topic. It is impossible to refer to all studies conducted on the same topic in the research. The researcher should focus on studies directly related to the research problem and exclude those that are not. This decision is left to the researcher's discretion.

4. The researcher then compiles the previous studies they deem relevant to the research problem, organizing them in a table for easier reading and noting important observations. The following table illustrates this process

Results	Country	Methodology	Sample size	Research topic	Author and year
-Violence is more prevalent in the capital	Yemen	Descriptive approach and ethnographic approach, and used questionnaire, participatory observation and unstructured interview	It was applied to a sample of 450 researchers from students, parents and teachers	A Socio-Anthropological Study of the Phenomena of Aggression and Vandalism	Al-Khayyat's study 2000
*-It is more prevalent in boys' schools	UAE	Descriptive approach	741 male students were selected from the College of Humanities	The Family and the Problem of Violence among Youth	Lutfi's study 2001
-Weak school administration and the lack of a social worker increases the rate of violence	Egypt	Descriptive approach and used questionnaire	500 female students from the College of Education	Violence and School Culture	Nasr's study 2003
-Verbal violence is one of the most common forms of violence among students.	Palestine	Descriptive analytical approach	The study sample consists of juvenile delinquents at Al-Rabi'a Institution, and 99 questionnaires were distributed to them randomly	The Impact of Social Factors on Juvenile Delinquency	Ibrahim Hamad Mohammed Hamad's study 2008

Note: This table is not included in the research paper because it contradicts the methodological design of scientific research; however, it should be written in the draft.

Through reading this table, several observations can be made concerning the time period in which these studies were conducted, the comparison of sample sizes used in each study, and the reasons for differences in sample sizes despite the studies employing the same methodology. It is also important to note the results reached by the studies and the points of agreement, particularly the idea that family upbringing is one of the causes of juvenile delinquency and the development of aggressive behavior.

It is essential to highlight that the results should vary. If all the studies lead to the same conclusions, there is a flaw either in the studies themselves or in how they were selected. A critical reading of the table allows for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen studies, discovering knowledge gaps they have not

addressed, and highlighting the contribution of the current research in addressing some of these gaps. For example, the researcher may point out that while all the studies relied upon were valuable and covered many important aspects of the topic of violence, they did not emphasize other factors influencing the emergence of aggressive behavior in children, such as economic or cultural factors.

Another example: When I read the title of a study, I form an idea about the key aspects it addresses. However, upon delving deeper into the study, I may find that it does not match my expectations. In this case, I would argue that my research fills certain gaps I see as essential to the topic, without necessarily emphasizing their importance directly. The researcher should explain the content of these gaps without diminishing the effort of previous researchers.

Furthermore, by reviewing the reference list used in previous studies, the researcher can form an idea about the quality of the references—whether they are old or new and whether they are diverse, etc.

The most important thing for the researcher to focus on in their commentary on previous studies is to be skillful in pointing out deficiencies without addressing them directly or in a manner that undermines the effort of the researchers involved.

6. Summarizing Previous Studies: This involves referencing the researcher's name, the study's title, its time and location, the general aim or hypothesis, the sample and methodology used, followed by the presentation of the key findings, without excessive detail or overly brief summarization.

Example:

The study by Hassouna (1999, Egypt), titled *"The Phenomenon of Student Violence,"* aimed to identify the phenomenon of student violence, its manifestations, and the underlying causes. This study was conducted on high school students with a sample size of 500 male and female students. The researcher used the descriptive method and employed a questionnaire. The study concluded with the following results:

- The main forms of student violence were assaulting teachers, burning valuable items, and vandalizing public property.
- Students also assaulted those who disagreed with them in terms of thought or belief.
- Among the underlying causes of the spread of violence were family issues, the school environment, and media influences.

It is important to avoid repetition when presenting results and to summarize as much as possible, as some studies may express results in a redundant manner.

Regarding the placement of previous studies in the research, there are two approaches: the first is to refer to them in the problem statement chapter as an independent element, and the second is to dedicate a separate chapter to them, particularly if the number of relevant studies is large and all of them are essential to the research.

6. Enhancing the analysis with previous research findings: Some results from previous studies may be referenced to reinforce the scientific position reached in the research, as well as to highlight how the current research contributes to establishing new results that were overlooked by earlier studies.

Seventh: What Do I Gain from the Critical Reading of Previous Studies?

Reviewing previous studies critically provides the following benefits:

- **Avoiding repetition and exploring new aspects:** A careful and detailed review of previous studies may give the researcher a chance to see new facets of the problem that earlier researchers did not notice. This helps enrich scientific knowledge and prevents the repetition of steps or methods addressing the same aspects of the problem.
- **Defining the research problem more precisely:** Burke and Gall indicated that previous studies can help define and better articulate the research problem.
- **Contributing to the redefinition of research objectives and highlighting overlooked points:** A critical review can lead to reformulating the study's goals and pointing out aspects that may have been missed by the researcher.
- **Helping the researcher define and operationalize key concepts:** A critical reading aids in clearly defining the key concepts and determining how they will be measured or applied.
- **Assessing the effectiveness of the methodology and data collection tools:** The researcher can evaluate whether the methods and tools used in previous studies are effective and may consider adopting some of these for their own research.
- **Identifying strengths and weaknesses in the studies:** Recognizing the strengths and weaknesses in previous research allows the researcher to build on the strengths and address the weaknesses in their own study.
- **Establishing the research's position based on a critical review of others' work:** A critical analysis positions the research in the broader scientific context, enhancing its academic value and potentially contributing novel insights to the field.

Abbas Abdul Mahdi Al-Sharifi summarizes the benefits of previous studies by stating: "Previous studies, as Patton pointed out, help identify the measurement tools that were successfully used in other research, avoid tools that failed to achieve their intended purpose or contained flaws preventing the desired outcomes, and

assist in avoiding closed methods, or what is known as dead ends. Moreover, this review aids in learning how to write research reports by paying attention to the style and organization used by researchers in their published works."

All of the aforementioned points are practical steps that allow the researcher to use the chosen studies in a way that enriches their own research. However, the researcher must be both intelligent and professional in dealing with previous studies to gain the maximum benefit from them.

Therefore, the researcher should possess the following qualities:

- Careful reading of the selected research.
- Constructive criticism.
- Familiarity with the subject's dimensions.
- Mastery of the language.
- A solid knowledge base in the field, which allows the researcher to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the study.
- The ability to provide scientific justification that enables the researcher to cleverly identify the knowledge gaps in the chosen studies.

Conclusion

In order for the researcher to benefit from the studies they have selected, they must avoid unfounded padding that might obstruct the research more than achieving its goals. As highlighted in this discussion, previous studies are not a summary of others' efforts but rather an evaluation of their work, identifying strengths and weaknesses to discover scientific gaps. This paves the way for employing and utilizing them in the research in a way that provides intellectual contributions, which could serve as a foundation for future research.

This evaluation is not random; it follows methodological and cognitive guidelines, with the core principle being the researcher's competence and skill in dealing with previous studies. Above all, the researcher must possess the patience to gather all relevant research materials, especially at a time when vast amounts of knowledge are available across technological platforms, making it easier for researchers and saving them significant effort, which should be invested in thoroughly and carefully reviewing the previous studies.

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