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Previous Studies: A Methodological Necessity or a Research Asset?

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***Abstract*—**This study examines the problem of using previous studies in scientific research by exploring their methodological and practical dimensions and identifying the common mistakes researchers, particularly doctoral students, make when engaging with them. It aims to clarify how previous studies can be effectively utilized and integrated into the various stages of the research process, rather than merely presenting their content and compiling information from them. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach by defining previous studies, explaining their functions in scientific research, analyzing patterns of utilization and the methodological errors associated with them, and proposing practical strategies to overcome these shortcomings and enhance their effective use. The study finds that the scientific value of previous studies is not achieved merely by presenting or summarizing them, but rather through their analysis, critical evaluation, and integration with the research topic, as well as their use in formulating the research problem, developing hypotheses, selecting appropriate methods and instruments, and interpreting findings. It also concludes that the effective use of previous studies contributes to strengthening the originality of scientific research, consolidating its methodological foundations, and avoiding unnecessary duplication and research deficiencies.

***Keywords*—**Previous studies; scientific research; researcher; stages of research; scientific research methodology.

Résumé:

Cette étude examine la problématique de l'utilisation des études antérieures dans la recherche scientifique, en mettant en évidence leurs dimensions méthodologiques et pratiques et en identifiant les erreurs courantes commises par les chercheurs, notamment les doctorants, dans leur exploitation. Elle vise à expliquer comment tirer pleinement profit des études antérieures et les intégrer efficacement aux différentes étapes du processus de recherche, au lieu de se limiter à en présenter le contenu et à en compiler les informations.

L'étude adopte une approche descriptive et analytique, consistant à définir les études antérieures, à expliquer leurs fonctions dans la recherche scientifique, à analyser les modalités de leur exploitation ainsi que les erreurs méthodologiques qui y sont associées, et à proposer des stratégies pratiques permettant de remédier à ces insuffisances et d'en améliorer l'utilisation. Les résultats montrent que la valeur scientifique des études antérieures ne réside pas dans leur simple présentation ou synthèse, mais dans leur analyse, leur évaluation critique et leur mise en relation avec le sujet de recherche, ainsi que dans leur mobilisation pour formuler la problématique, élaborer les hypothèses, choisir les méthodes et les outils appropriés et interpréter les résultats. L'étude conclut également que l'exploitation efficace des études antérieures contribue à renforcer l'originalité de la recherche scientifique, à consolider ses fondements méthodologiques et à éviter les répétitions inutiles ainsi que les insuffisances de la recherche.

Mots-clés : études antérieures ; recherche scientifique ; chercheur ; étapes de la recherche ; méthodologie de la recherche scientifique.

Introduction:

Previous studies occupy a fundamental position in scientific research, as they enable researchers to explore the accumulated scientific knowledge relevant to their research topics and situate their studies within the broader

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scientific context. They also allow researchers to identify the research problems addressed by previous scholars, the methods they adopted, the findings they reached, and the aspects that still require further investigation. Accordingly, reviewing previous studies is not merely a formal academic requirement or an exercise in collecting references; rather, it is a fundamental methodological activity that helps researchers clarify concepts, formulate the research problem, identify research gaps, select appropriate research methods and instruments, and determine the position of the current study in relation to existing knowledge.

Nevertheless, the effective use of previous studies may present several methodological and practical challenges. Researchers, particularly doctoral students and novice researchers, may sometimes limit their work to presenting the titles and findings of previous studies without analyzing, comparing, or critically evaluating them, or relating them to the current research. Furthermore, the abundance of scientific sources and the rapid development of digital databases and scholarly publications available online may make it more difficult to search for, select, classify, and evaluate relevant literature. These challenges highlight the need to adopt systematic and critical procedures that enable researchers to distinguish relevant and scientifically valuable studies, avoid methodological shortcomings and unnecessary duplication, and effectively integrate previous studies into the various stages of the research process.

Research Problem: In light of the foregoing, the central research problem addressed by this study is formulated as follows:

To what extent can previous studies be transformed from a mere methodological requirement into an effective research resource, and what methodological and practical means can be adopted to ensure their selection, analysis, and critical and effective use throughout the various stages of the research process?

The main research question gives rise to the following sub-questions:

1. What are the main conceptual and methodological foundations of previous studies in scientific research?
2. Why is reviewing previous studies important for understanding and developing the current research problem?
3. What methodological criteria should guide the process of collecting, selecting, classifying, and evaluating previous studies?
4. What are the main approaches that can be adopted when reviewing and engaging with previous studies?
5. How can previous studies be critically analyzed and effectively integrated into the various stages of the research process?
6. What are the most common methodological errors in reviewing and using previous studies, and what strategies can help researchers overcome them?

Research Hypotheses: This study is based on the following two hypotheses:

First hypothesis: The scientific value of previous studies depends not on their quantity, but rather on their relevance to the research topic, scientific quality, critical analysis, and effective integration into the research process.

Second hypothesis: The effective use of previous studies contributes to improving the formulation of the research problem, questions, and hypotheses; strengthening methodological choices; identifying research gaps; and supporting the originality and scientific coherence of the current study.

Research Objectives: This study aims to:

1. Examine the conceptual and methodological foundations of previous studies in scientific research.
2. Clarify the importance and functions of reviewing previous studies in constructing and developing scientific research.
3. Identify the main methodological requirements and criteria for collecting, selecting, classifying, and evaluating previous studies.
4. Examine the principal approaches used to review, analyze, compare, and critically evaluate previous studies.
5. Identify the various areas in which previous studies can be utilized throughout the research process.
6. Identify common methodological errors associated with reviewing and using previous studies and propose practical strategies to overcome them.

Significance of the Study: The significance of this study stems from the central role that previous studies play in developing scientific research and connecting current investigations with accumulated scientific knowledge. By examining their methodological functions, selection criteria, analytical approaches, and areas of application, the

study seeks to clarify the conditions necessary for conducting an effective and systematic review of the scholarly literature. It also emphasizes the importance of critical analysis, methodological evaluation, appropriate source selection, accurate referencing, and the purposeful use of previous studies. These practices contribute to transforming the review of previous studies from a merely formal academic requirement into an effective research resource that strengthens originality, methodological coherence, and the advancement of scientific knowledge.

Research Methodology: To address the research problem and achieve its objectives, this study adopts the descriptive-analytical approach. The descriptive component is used to present and clarify the concept of previous studies, explain their functions, describe methods of collecting them, identify the criteria for selecting them, and outline the various approaches used to review and utilize them. The analytical component is employed to examine the methodological value of previous studies, analyze common errors associated with their use, determine their implications for the research process, and identify appropriate strategies for improving their effective utilization. The study also draws on relevant methodological and scientific literature concerning previous studies, literature reviews, scientific research methodology, and research practices.

Structure of the Study: To provide a systematic examination of the subject, the study is divided into nine main sections:

- Section One: Examines the concept of previous studies and explains their main characteristics and role in scientific research.
- Section Two: Investigates the objectives and functions of reviewing previous studies, particularly their contribution to defining the research problem, identifying research gaps, and guiding the research process.
- Section Three: Discusses the methods and procedures for collecting previous studies and organizing the relevant scholarly literature.
- Section Four: Focuses on the methodological criteria governing the selection and evaluation of previous studies.
- Section Five: Examines the main approaches to engaging with previous studies and integrating them functionally into the research process.
- Section Six: Discusses how previous studies can be reviewed through analysis, comparison, evaluation, and critical examination.
- Section Seven: Presents the principal principles and tasks involved in reviewing the literature and explains their role in strengthening the scientific foundations of research.
- Section Eight: Explores the various areas in which previous studies can be utilized, from formulating the research problem and designing the methodology to interpreting findings and identifying future research directions.
- Section Nine: Focuses on common methodological errors in reviewing and using previous studies and presents appropriate strategies for overcoming them.

The study concludes by presenting its principal findings, recommendations, and prospects for future research.

1. *The Concept of Previous Studies*

Previous studies encompass all research connected to the topic that has been published in any form, provided it makes a scientifically valuable contribution. Publication may take the form of print, lectures, audio-only broadcasts, audio-visual recordings, or submissions to academic institutions for an academic degree or purely for scientific contribution. They refer to the body of prior research addressing the researcher's topic of interest. The researcher relies on these studies to analyze their content and establish comparisons between prior literature and the current research.[1]

Previous studies also represent a systematic process of classifying and analyzing information related to the research problem, including research papers, documents, journals, books, sources, and references that a researcher must examine to chart a course for their current study. It can be said that any study preceding the current one qualifies as a previous study, wherein the researcher reviews all literature written in their intended research field. Consequently, this step aims to summarize the findings of past researchers and understand how they overcame challenges. Researchers then synthesize the information obtained from reviewing prior literature in light of their current interests and research questions.[2]

2. *Purpose of Reviewing Previous Studies*

The purpose of reviewing previous studies is to summarize or distill the key findings of research related to the research problem using a scientific inferential approach that bridges deductive and inductive reasoning. Furthermore, researchers are required to synthesize the knowledge gained from this review:[3]

a. **Problem Identification:** Through scanning and reviewing previous research, the researcher eliminates ambiguity surrounding the research problem, defining it precisely through scientific methodology. Literature review also clarifies study concepts and terms by subjecting them to measurement and experimentation through operational definitions. If a study involves abstract concepts, these require operational definitions based on the procedures employed by the researcher. Sometimes, novice researchers struggle to formulate research questions and hypotheses. Reviewing relevant literature helps bridge this gap, enabling researchers to position their study within a broader disciplinary framework.
b. **Contextualizing the Study Historically:** A defining characteristic of research in the humanities and social sciences is cumulativity—the availability of interconnected bodies of research where scholars build upon previous findings. Analyzing prior studies allows the researcher to determine the precise position of their current study relative to existing literature, explaining how new knowledge will be generated. Knowledge in any field results from the cumulative, sequential efforts of preceding researchers.
c. **Understanding Contradictions in Prior Research:** Reviewing previous studies sometimes reveals conflicting findings. Such phenomena are constructive in general and particularly within educational and media research, where discrepancies often stem from variations in researcher methodology, research design, data collection instruments, or data analysis techniques. Comprehending these contradictions presents a valuable challenge that prompts researchers to resolve them through rigorous investigation.
d. **Preventing Unintentional Duplication:** Literature review guards against investigating topics whose results have already been verified. However, if a researcher identifies gaps requiring further inquiry, pursuing such a study is fully justified as it generates novel knowledge.
e. **Selecting Appropriate Research Methodology:** Examining prior studies fosters deep critical insight, occasionally enabling researchers to propose alternative methods, procedures, or tools that improve upon previous approaches.
f. **Selecting Appropriate Data Collection Instruments:** As researchers delve into literature reviews, they become familiar with a wide array of data collection tools—such as tests, scales, questionnaires, and documents—allowing them to evaluate their consistency and applicability to the current problem.[4]
g. **Linking Results to Existing Knowledge and Proposing Future Research:** A standard step in social sciences research involves drawing conclusions and comparing them with prior findings to highlight similarities, articulate new knowledge, and suggest future studies that expand current boundaries.[5]

3. ***How to Collect Previous Studies***

Researchers cannot conduct scientific research without reviewing the scientific heritage of their field. Research acumen dictates starting where others left off to save time and effort, leveraging global access to research via databases and the internet. Contemporary approaches to literature reviewing emphasize the importance of developing a structured search strategy, defining relevant sources and search terms, and documenting the procedures used to identify and select studies. Such procedures enhance transparency and reduce the possibility of arbitrary or incomplete selection of literature[6], Literature review occurs in two stages:

a. **Preliminary Stage:** The researcher directly or indirectly monitors and tracks writings, studies, scientific papers, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, and conference proceedings. A comprehensive scan of all accessible studies is essential, albeit rigorous.
b. **Classification Stage:** After forming an overarching idea of these writings, the researcher categorizes them into topics directly or indirectly related to the study.

To streamline this process, researchers should follow these steps:[7]

c. Identify relevant universities, faculties, and departments specializing in the research field to save considerable time and effort while accessing specialized library collections.
d. Identify research centers focused on the study topic, as they often publish specialized research, host seminars, or maintain specialized libraries.
e. Conduct targeted internet searches via academic search engines to uncover digital studies inaccessible through traditional means.

f. Communicate, when appropriate, with universities, researchers, and research centers to request lawful academic access to relevant full-text theses and conference papers.

Executing this step correctly yields vital benefits:[8]

a. **Saving Time:** Directing focus immediately toward relevant institutions and avoiding random searches.
b. **Conserving Effort:** Eliminating unnecessary travel to unrelated libraries.
c. **Enhancing Academic Competence:** Building a robust repository of institutional knowledge that facilitates future projects and peer consultation.

4. ***Methodological Criteria for Selecting Previous Studies***

Researchers must adhere to rigorous criteria when selecting previous studies:[9]

a. The study must be fully accessible in libraries or online databases as a full-text document.
b. The selected study must address one or more variables of the current research.
c. The researcher should evaluate whether the study successfully refined their topic and moved from ambiguity to clarity.
d. Studies sharing the exact same title should not be automatically avoided or selected based on title similarity alone; rather, the entire study—from theoretical framework to methodology and results—must be evaluated for investment value.
e. Studies addressing a specific variable must have dedicated a comprehensive section to it, rather than merely defining the term.
f. Master's and bachelor's theses should be evaluated carefully, particularly with regard to methodological rigor, source quality, and the extent of academic supervision and review they have received.
g. Researchers should avoid making absolute claims such as “there are no previous studies on this topic” unless such claims are supported by a sufficiently comprehensive and systematic search.

5. ***Approaches to Handling Previous Studies***

Different approaches have been proposed for conducting literature reviews. Some approaches emphasize thematic organization and critical synthesis of previous studies, whereas others focus on integrating the literature throughout the different stages of the research process. The appropriate approach depends on the research question, disciplinary context, and purpose of the review.[10]

It is advisable to combine these approaches by embedding prior studies functionally within the relevant parts of the research while also providing comprehensive summaries and critical analyses. This approach allows the researcher to demonstrate the relationship between the existing literature and the current study and to clarify the contribution of the research to existing knowledge.

6. ***How to Review Previous Studies***

a. Previous studies must not be reviewed in isolation; rather, the researcher must analyze, critique, compare, and judge their value across various dimensions to inform research hypotheses, design, and instrumentation. Effective literature reviewing requires more than descriptive reporting. It involves identifying patterns and relationships among studies, comparing their methodological choices and findings, assessing their strengths and limitations, and synthesizing the available evidence in relation to the current research question.[11]
b. Literature review demands higher-order cognitive processes—comparison, analysis, gap identification, evidence evaluation, and methodological critique—transforming it into a rigorous scholarly endeavor.
c. Critical review requires the researcher to contemplate alternative interpretations that original authors may have overlooked; experienced researchers scrutinize published works before accepting their evidentiary validity.
d. Researchers must critically assess the evidence, supporting data, and methodological validity of every cited study rather than accepting conclusions uncritically.
e. Cross-comparing previous studies enables the construction of a comprehensive macro-perspective, which is impossible through isolated or single-study examinations.[12]

7. **Rules and Tasks of Literature Review**

a. **Constituent Rules for Reviewing Literature:** To distinguish between indispensable studies (highly relevant) and dispensable ones (marginally relevant), researchers should:[13]

- Enumerate the core elements of the research based on its title and problem statement to establish a focal point.

- Examine previous studies sequentially to determine the presence and concentration of these core elements within their titles, main headings, and subheadings.

b. ***Tasks of Literature Review:*** As summarized by Said Ismaili Sini, literature reviews fulfill several essential tasks for both researchers and readers:

- Confirming that previous studies have not addressed the problem using the exact same angle and methodology, thereby demonstrating research significance.[14]
- Clarifying the proposed study's positioning and unique contribution within the field.
- Clarifying problem dimensions and alerting the researcher to potential obstacles.
- Providing insights into appropriate methodologies, highlighting strengths to emulate and weaknesses to avoid.
- Directing researchers to valuable bibliographic sources cited in prior reference lists.
- Informing the researcher about the nature of available data (accessible vs. complex).
- Providing a theoretical framework or foundational baseline for the study.
- Furnishing a background context against which research results can be discussed.

8. ***Areas of Utilization from Previous Studies***

Previous studies benefit researchers across multiple dimensions:[15]

a. **Constructing the Research Problem:** Serving as foundational sources for formulating research problems, questions, and hypotheses.[16]

b. **Highlighting Study Significance:** Distinguishing the current research from prior literature.

c. **Identifying Strengths and Weaknesses:** Evaluating prior methodological approaches.[17]

d. **Avoiding Redundancy:** Preventing the replication of completed studies on identical populations.

e. **Shaping Objectives:** Directing research toward unexplored topics, unaddressed aspects, or unresolved findings.

f. **Cross-Cultural Comparison:** Benefiting from international or cross-environmental applications.[18]

g. **Enhancing Research Credibility:** Demonstrating reliance on recent, high-quality, and up-to-date data.

h. **Proper Citations:** Ensuring all utilized studies are accurately cited and referenced in-text and in bibliographies.[19]

Previous studies should be integrated into the text chronologically to reflect cumulativity and the evolution of phenomena. Each study should be followed by a disciplined, critical scholarly commentary detailing identified gaps, contradictions, or methodological limitations, culminating in empirical foundations for hypothesis building and research design.[20]

9. ***Common Errors in Reviewing and Utilizing Previous Studies***

Common methodological errors committed by students in reviewing and utilizing previous literature include:[21]

a. **Superficial Literature Review:** Rapid reviews often cause researchers to overlook critical information or unintentionally investigate recently studied topics.[22]

b. **Overreliance on Secondary Sources:** Relying heavily on secondary data cited within previous studies rather than consulting primary sources, which compromises academic integrity and research quality.

c. **Restricting Literature Sources:** Believing that previous studies are exclusively restricted to specific journal types, ignoring international and national peer-reviewed journals and specialized periodicals.[23]

d. **Improper Presentation of Previous Studies:** Listing studies haphazardly by merely mentioning titles and results without summarizing research problems, questions, hypotheses, methodologies, instruments, samples, spatial-temporal boundaries, and critical commentary. Neglecting chronological order is also a frequent error.[24]

Conclusion:

Previous studies constitute an essential component of scientific research and should not be treated merely as a formal methodological procedure or a descriptive compilation of information. Their effective use requires researchers to move beyond mere presentation and summarization towards critical analysis, comparison, evaluation, and functional integration. A thorough review of previous studies enables researchers to clarify the research problem, identify knowledge gaps, formulate appropriate research questions and hypotheses, select suitable research methods and data collection instruments, and establish the theoretical foundations of the study. It

also contributes to understanding the historical and scientific development of the research topic and avoiding unnecessary duplication of existing research.

The study further concludes that the scientific and practical value of previous studies depends largely on researchers' ability to utilize them throughout the various stages of the research process. Their contribution becomes more significant when researchers critically examine the findings, methods, strengths, limitations, and areas of divergence among previous studies and then relate these elements to their own research objectives. Accordingly, previous studies should be regarded as a dynamic research resource that contributes to the construction, development, and interpretation of scientific knowledge, rather than as an independent section added to a study merely to satisfy formal academic requirements.

Findings:

1. Previous studies play a fundamental role in defining the research problem, identifying research gaps, and formulating research questions and hypotheses.
2. The effective use of previous studies requires their analysis and comparison, the evaluation of their methods and findings, and the identification of their strengths and limitations, rather than merely summarizing their contents.
3. Previous studies contribute to methodological decision-making by helping researchers select appropriate research designs, methods, data collection instruments, and analytical procedures.
4. The proper integration of previous studies into the various stages of the research process enhances the originality, credibility, and scientific coherence of research while reducing unnecessary duplication and methodological shortcomings.

Recommendations:

1. Researchers, particularly doctoral students, should receive training in systematic and critical literature review techniques rather than relying exclusively on descriptive summaries of previous studies.
2. Researchers should prioritize relevant, accessible, reliable, and scientifically rigorous sources and, whenever possible, consult primary sources rather than relying excessively on references to secondary sources.
3. Previous studies should be functionally integrated into the various stages of the research process, including the formulation of the research problem and hypotheses, methodological design, and discussion of findings.
4. Universities and scientific research institutions should provide researchers with practical training in the use of academic databases, reference management, source evaluation, citation techniques, and the critical analysis of scholarly literature.

Future Research Directions:

Future research could examine the practical effectiveness of different literature review strategies across various academic disciplines, particularly by comparing traditional approaches with digital and artificial intelligence-assisted methods. Further studies could also investigate how researchers assess the quality and relevance of academic sources available online in light of their rapid expansion, while preserving scientific integrity, critical thinking, and scholarly originality.

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