Article review of Randolph (2006) 'A Guide to Writing the Dissertation literature Review'

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ABSTRACT. The main purpose of this review of the article is to analyze critically to what extent the author has been successful in capturing the essence of literature review by addressing the key issues like: *how faulty literature review leads to derail of a dissertation; how to write high-quality dissertation literature review; purpose of writing literature review; taxonomy of literature review; steps to conduct literature review; common mistakes and framework for the self-evaluation of a literature review.* The researcher used Cooper's (1988) taxonomy of literature reviews (CTLR) as methodological tool to critically review the claims of the author. The researcher found the article an interesting and useful work of the author in providing guidelines about writing literature reviews. The findings support most of the claims of the author regarding the guidelines provided. The author' discourse on the topic found to be consistent and engaging except a few points which still demand more clarity to understand, which opens new space for writers to develop a comprehensive framework like using an integrative framework of literature review.

Keywords: *Rview framework; dissertation writing; Taxonomy of literature;*

I. **Introduction.** The main purpose of this review which builds on the work of Randolph (2006) review of the article -'a guide to writing the dissertation literature review' is to examine with a critical eye and report on the content, structure and language of the article and writers' perceptions, updated knowledge of relevant literature review through his key points that the author has come up with his justifications (Wallace & Wray, 2006). As a reviewer of the article, I found the writer has been successful, to a great extent, in highlighting most of the key points in the article with his justifications through relevant literature by claiming to provide a guideline for researchers and students writing dissertations to conduct high quality literature reviews.

The article is grounded based on these key points: *how faulty literature review leads to derail of a dissertation; how to write high-quality dissertation literature review; purpose of writing literature review; taxonomy of literature review; steps to conduct literature review; common mistakes and framework for the self-evaluation of a literature review.* The author' discourse on the topic found to be consistent and engaging for readers except a few which still demand more clarity to understand opening new avenues for future researcher to fill the gap. A specific methodological space, among a few existing ones, is used to guide the review of the article in a systematic and critical manner.

2. **Methodology.** Review of research articles, books and other academic work is fundamentally the

'research of research' which is more challenging and demanding to have highly analytical and critical thinking skills (Whittemore & Knafle, 2005) to evaluate and report. It certainly needs a framework to do this critical research work. However, there exists a limited literature on how to conduct an effective, updated, relevant and reliable literature review for a chosen area of study (Abuel- Ealeh, 2009; Boote & Beile, 2005; Gall Borg and Gall, 1996; Randolph, 2006; Whittemore et al., 2005). Moreover, researchers and students are usually not taught specific courses on 'literature review' with specific focus to its conceptual understanding, theoretical frameworks, and importance and limitations of certain frameworks to conduct literature reviews.

Within such parameters I used the CTLR among other frameworks like: Ogawa and Malen's (1991) qualitative review, systematic reviews, integrated reviews and meta-analysis (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006: Glass, 1976; Hemingway, 2009: Jadad, Moher, & Klassen, 1998). The reasons for selecting CTLR among other frameworks are: 1) to see how effectively Randolph (2006) used the framework to develop his guidelines for literature review; 2) to evaluate the authors' justifications in the light of his arguments in developing guidelines for literature review. Using CTLR framework and following the steps of review I reviewed the article in a developmental progression through critical analysis and evaluation approach.

3. Findings and Discussions. The findings show that, the author developed his arguments with enough support from relevant literature reviews. Moreover, he added some of the important points which identify existing gaps in the literature regarding the topic under discussion, i.e., a dearth of literature available on the topic to guide the writers to follow some rules about writing literature reviews. This clearly shows the authors' scholarly approach and strong grasp on the subject matter by identifying gray areas and contributing to fill the gaps in the literature in order to make the discussion more engaging and helpful for all new and experienced writers.

The demonstrated evidence from literature review to support the first point regarding how a faulty literature review leads to derail the dissertation, the author tried to convince writers on what kind of things to keep in mind while reviewing a piece of literature. For example he warns the writers regarding the 'doubts' which normally develop in the minds of examiners about a research work on 'encountering an inadequate literature review, examiners would proceed to look at the methods of data collection, the analysis, and the conclusions more carefully' (Boote & Beile, 2005, p. 6). The examples and guidelines create enough motivation to be aware of what to do and what not to do while writing literature reviews which is one of the strong points of the author in the article.

Moreover, the author provides a clear purpose for writing a 'high-quality dissertation literature review' with evidences from different writers' point of views making the ground for providing rationale, significance and need for all academic writings. He informs the writers about his claims and views of other authors like Boote and Beile (2005) and Gall Borg and Gall (1996), to name a few, on limited information available to guide writers on how to write literature review for dissertation and journal article shows that the author has well articulated the scenario about the issue.

Furthermore he seems to emphasize writers to follow the Cooper's (1988) conceptual framework - CTLR, as guideline, with five characteristics: focus goal, perspective, coverage, organization, and audience which are given as principles to review literature. At the same time, the author highlighted all six categories in detail with examples and explanations of the terms what they mean to be while writing a literature review based on

CTLR framework. These characteristics of the review, according to Cooper sited by the author, should be carefully looked at: 1) *research outcomes; 2) research methods; 3) theories used; 4) practices or applications* etc. According to author while reviewing literature writers should consider these four elements of the focus of the review to make it a good literature review (Randolph, 2006; Cooper, 1998).

Finding shows that, he focused on the goal of literature review that should look at meta-analysis technique by integrating and generalizing the quantitative outcomes across studies and should also look at the other goals of the review as per se (Machi & McEvoy, 2009; Webster & Watson, 2002). However the author did not even discuss at qualitative outcome by using meta-analysis which shows these matters demand to elaborate to make writers informed and aware. However, he thoroughly discussed about the qualitative literature review by using two methods: Ogawa and Malen (1991) – in eight steps and that is really seemed to be very helpful for novice researchers in doing qualitative review; and phenomenology in five steps in detail but did not discuss at Noblit and Hare (1988) for no reason mentioned, that shows that the author needs to provide an explanation like other methods he did or at least should give his justification to satisfy the writers to avoid confusion.

The fourth characteristics of the taxonomy, the coverage, according to author should be classified into again four groups: exhaustive, exhaustive with selective citation, representative, and central and pivotal were found to be engaging and clearer to understand. The organization of review was suggested in formats like historical, conceptual and methodological to follow for reviews is looking very interesting. The *historical formats* looks for chronological organization; the *conceptual format* is built around the concepts; while *methodological format* looks for a sequence like introduction, methods, results, and discussion which gives a clear picture of formats.

The audience, the last characteristics of the review explained clearly, in case of dissertations showed as primary, the supervisors and reviewers of the dissertations, and secondary audience may be the scholars within the field of study. The way five points like *problem formulation, data collection, data evaluation, analysis and interpretation, and public presentation* to conduct a literature review were not only elaborated clearly but also discussed the research stages in conducting literature review, formulating and justifying empirical research questions, and quantitative and qualitative literature review notes for more explanation and guidance showing author' strong hold on the topic.

At the end of the article, the author discussed self explanatory 'seven common mistakes' alongwith providing a self-evaluation of literature review tool using Bootes and Beile (2005)' five-category rubric that is found to be very helpful for writers to avoid such kind of mistakes. By critically analyzing the whole article, the overall content, organization and APA format of citations and referencing show the command of the author on the subject matter and other technicalities in writing scholarly articles like this. As a reviewer of the this article I enjoyed the language, direction, evidence from literature and context related examples, the clarity of ideas, and purposeful engagement of the author regarding the subject matter in order to achieve the objectives of the topic under discussion. However, the author used CTLR as theoretical bases for his article but found taking an integrative approach by taking other frameworks and rubrics like Ogawa and Malen (1991) and phenomenology, and Bootes and Beile (2005) respectively in explaining some of the points that shows not a single framework can provide a comprehensive guideline to write a successful literature review.

4. Conclusion. The article will definitely help both novice and veteran researchers and writers in the field to understand the importance of literature review and techniques to conduct it. The step by step approach to developing relevant, updated and appropriate literature review using CTLR framework is a great contribution of the author. Similarly keeping writers alert about the common mistakes, which may lead to derail a research work even on a very emergent topic, that seems very helpful warnings to writers in conducting an effective literature review either for dissertation / journal article or for a funding project work. However, there seems to be a wide scope for researchers to explore and develop more comprehensive and integrated review frameworks that can be used in any field of study to review literature effectively.

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