

Developing a critical literature review

Erkin Mukhammedov



Introduction

Introduce yourself

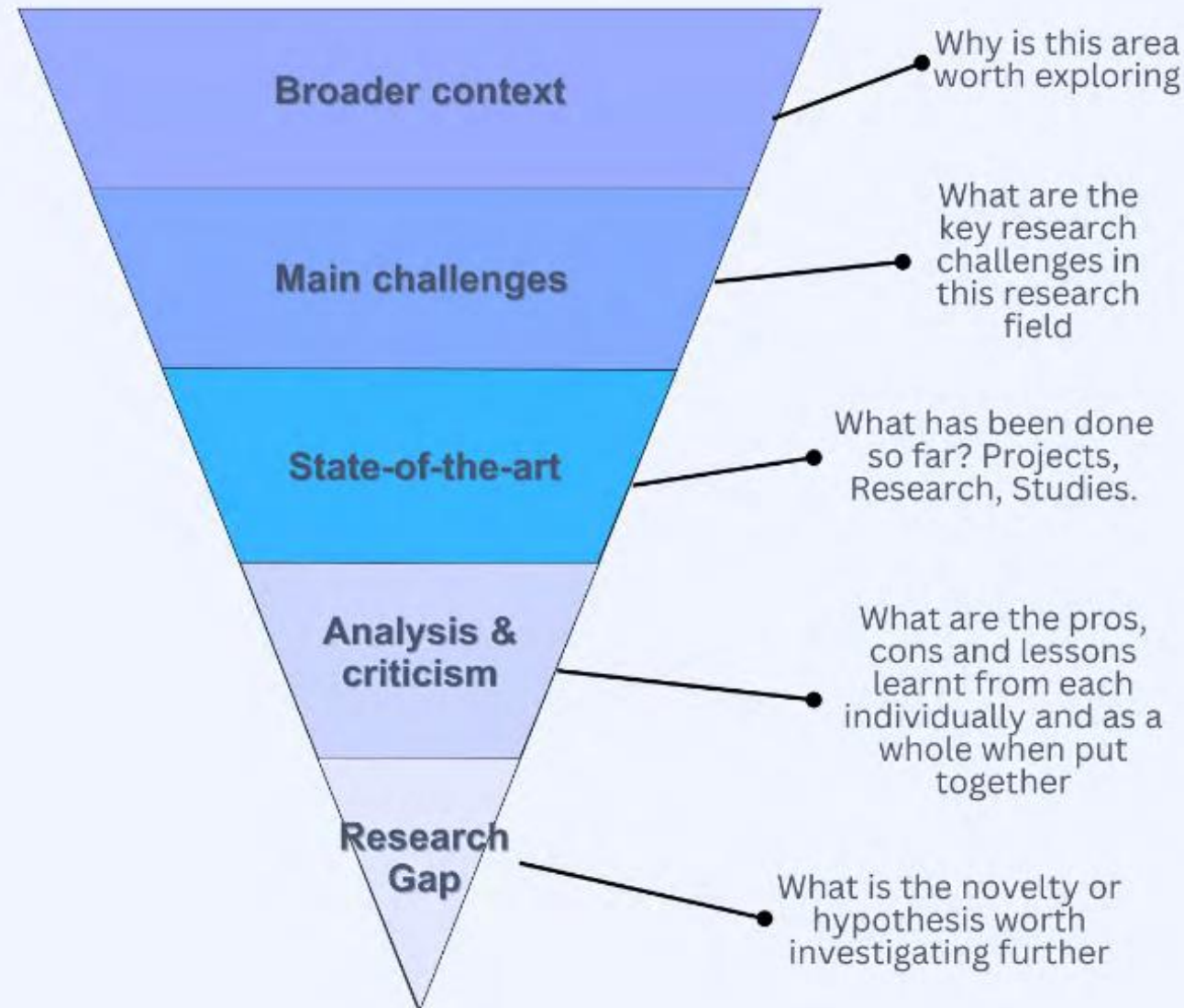
share your research area/focus

What's the biggest challenge
you've faced in writing a lit review?

Literature review

A literature review is a comprehensive review and analysis of the published literature on a specific topic or research question. The literature that is reviewed contains: books, articles, academic articles, conference proceedings, association papers, and dissertations. It contains the most pertinent studies and points to important past and current research and practices. It provides background and context, and shows how your research will contribute to the field.

Taken from: <https://guides.lib.utexas.edu/literaturereviews>



Developing a **critical** literature review

Going beyond simply summarizing existing research—it's about analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing what has been published on a topic

Sample
paragraphs

Do they ...

- analyze
- evaluate
- and synthesize the information?

Go Beyond Summary

Instead of just stating what each study says, evaluate:

- What are the strengths/weaknesses of each study?
- Are the methods appropriate?
- Any limitations?
- Is the evidence convincing?
- Are the conclusions justified?

Example

Example: Instead of writing, “Smith (2021) found that X improves Y,” try:

“While Smith (2021) identifies a link between X and Y, the reliance on self-reported data limits the generalizability of these findings.”

Compare and Contrast Studies

Put sources in dialogue
with each other:

- Do they agree or contradict each other?
- Do they build on each other?
- Are there theoretical or methodological differences?

Example

While both Lee (2019) and Kumar (2020) examine Z, Lee's use of qualitative methods yields rich contextual insights that Kumar's quantitative analysis overlooks.

Focus on Relevance to Your Research

Always ask:

- How does this help frame, justify, or contextualize my own research?
- Highlight gaps that your study fills.
- Point out what hasn't been explored.

Example

Although existing studies address the efficacy of online learning tools, few examine their impact on non-traditional students — a gap my study seeks to address.

Identify Bias and Assumptions

What are the underlying assumptions in the literature?

- Is there disciplinary bias?
- Are certain voices missing (e.g. gender, race, global South)?
- Are theories applied uncritically?

Synthesize, Don't Just List

Group studies thematically or methodologically. Create a coherent narrative rather than a list of studies.

- Chronological (if trends over time matter)
- Thematic (by topic or idea)
- Methodological (by how the research was done)

References

- Blair, L. (2016). *Writing a Graduate Thesis or Dissertation*. Sense publishers.
- Oliver, P.(2012). *Succeeding with Your Literature Review: A handbook for students*. Open University Press.