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The Theoretical and Practical Importance of Reviewing Previous Studies in Educational Scientific Research

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Abstract ;

Reviewing previous studies represents one of the essential stages in educational research, as it contributes to a deep understanding of the theoretical framework related to the research problem. Through this process, the researcher highlights the scientific value and academic contribution of the completed research. The present paper seeks to emphasize the theoretical and practical importance of this stage in the research process, by clarifying its cognitive role in enabling the researcher to comprehend the existing body of knowledge, identify research gaps in his field, and guide the theoretical construction toward the appropriate methodology. Furthermore, reviewing previous studies allows the researcher to compare and contrast his findings with those of earlier works, thereby enhancing the credibility and scientific value of his results.

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1. *Introduction*

Enhancing both theoretical and practical understanding of educational research problems requires the researcher to review and survey the theoretical heritage related to the educational phenomenon or issue under investigation. This process, known as reviewing previous studies, allows the researcher to access what has been written by others in the same research field and to collect the ideas and perspectives of other scholars regarding the available information that may help clarify the study's subject.

Through such review, the researcher situates the study within a historical and conceptual framework, which leads to a clearer and deeper comprehension of the problem and its various dimensions. This step constitutes the beginning of a new phase in the scientific research process, commonly referred to as the theoretical framework stage.

After formulating the research problem, defining the hypotheses, and specifying the essential concepts, the researcher proceeds to identify the data, information, and facts necessary for the study. Since educational and psychological research often deals with human behaviour a complex and multifaceted phenomenon it becomes imperative to conduct a careful review of prior studies, whether directly or indirectly related to the topic, in order to build a solid theoretical foundation.

Scientific knowledge is cumulative; hence, reviewing previous studies means learning from and building upon what others have achieved. Educational problems cannot be properly understood or analyzed without referring to their historical and contextual background. In the educational field, the end of one scientific study often marks the beginning of another. Today's research builds upon that of the past, and future research will, in turn, build upon the studies of today. Thus, knowledge is accumulative and interconnected.

When the researcher defines the problem and begins to gather data, it becomes necessary to locate and organize the existing knowledge within the scope of the study. Reviewing previous studies serves to deepen the researcher's understanding of the subject matter, to trace the development of ideas over time, and to establish a historical perspective for the research.

To explore further the significance of reviewing previous studies in educational research, both theoretically and practically, this paper seeks to answer the following questions:

_What is meant by "reviewing previous studies"?

_What is the theoretical and practical importance of reviewing previous studies in educational research?

_How can previous studies be obtained (i.e., what are their sources)?

_What are the steps involved in reviewing previous studies?

_How are previous studies presented and summarized in educational research?

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1. The Concept of Previous Studies

The review of previous research refers to the process of summarizing and synthesizing the main findings of earlier studies related to the research problem. This review does not simply consist of gathering the results of these studies, but rather requires the researcher to analyze and critically evaluate what has been read, in order to produce a coherent and integrated understanding within the same educational or psychological field of inquiry(Raja Mahmoud , 2004, p. 89).

Previous studies, therefore, involve summarizing,condensing, and integrating the results of prior research directly linked to the topic under investigation. From a methodological perspective, this stage combines both inductive and deductive reasoning, since it relies on inferential and logical thinking to synthesize the acquired knowledge(Mohammed Bakr, Mohammed Mustafa, & Ferial, 2007, p. 111).

Previous studies can also be defined as the books, articles, or academic works that address the same topic or one of its significant aspects, with the aim of enhancing the content of the research and obtaining information and data that help the researcher achieve new insights or findings**.** Reviewing these studies also involves evaluating and critiquing their weaknesses and limitations when necessary(Ismail , 2022, p. 12).

Hence, reviewing previous studies is an essential part of any scientific research, as it provides a theoretical foundation and enhances understanding of the research problem under investigation. Through a comprehensive review of academic works, research papers, and various references that address the same issue—or parts of it—the researcher can begin from where others have stopped, clarify similarities and differences between his study and earlier ones, identify research gaps, and situate his work within the broader scientific context.

2. The Theoretical and Practical Importance of Reviewing Previous Studies in Educational Research

When the researcher begins this stage, especially a beginner in research, they often face difficulty in gaining a comprehensive scientific grasp of the topic. This difficulty lies in not knowing what to review — should they consult books dealing with the research problem, academic papers, conference proceedings, or only scientific theses and dissertations?

In fact, the studies that should be reviewed by the novice researcher or student are academic works directly related to the research problem as a whole or to some of its aspects. These include published and unpublished scientific theses, academic research papers, and other relevant publications, whether printed in books or academic journals. The researcher may also benefit from books, newspapers, and magazines that have addressed the topic or parts of it, in order to understand both theoretical and practical dimensions through summarizing and discussing key ideas.

2.1. Theoretical Importance

This step contributes significantly to explaining and clarifying the background

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of the study's topic. It helps the researcher understand all aspects related to the research problem under investigation, through reviewing concepts, theories, and prior works and understanding how these have evolved across different studies

.By situating the current study within the correct context and framework, the researcher can identify research gaps and build upon existing literature, theories, and previous research to provide new insights that facilitate a deeper understanding of educational phenomena and problems.

Furthermore, reviewing prior studies enables the researcher to avoid the mistakes and redundancies made by previous scholars. By analyzing past works, the researcher can identify errors or obstacles that may have affected the quality of earlier research, thus improving the reliability and validity of his own results.

According to Qandiliji (2020), reviewing prior studies also helps the researcher define and refine the full title of the research after confirming that it comprehensively covers the precise conceptual, spatial, and temporal dimensions of the topic. In other words, exploratory readings of previous research help the researcher formulate a clear, inclusive, and meaningful title for the study(Kandliji, 2020, p. 56).

The researcher benefits from the experiences of previous scholars, especially when the problem was studied in different countries or contexts. Comparing methodologies and sources allows the researcher to understand how others approached the same issue and how they collected, analyzed, and presented their data.(Mahmoud, 2014, p. 244)

2.2. Practical Importance

The importance of reviewing previous studies is not confined to theoretical and conceptual grounding; it also carries practical and methodological value, as explained below:

_Reviewing prior studies enables the researcher to choose the most suitable methodology for achieving reliable results,whether rit is experimental,clinical,descriptive,or another approach.

_Exposure to previous studies helps the researcher identify the most appropriate instruments for collecting data related to the problem for instance, observation sheets, scales, questionnaires, or tests — depending on the research's objectives and nature.

_Through previous studies, the educational researcher becomes familiar with various populations, samples, and variables that have already been examined. This assists in defining the most relevant population, sample characteristics, and sampling techniques (e.g., random, stratified, cluster sampling), ensuring that the study's data are representative and valid.

_Reviewing prior studies enables the researcher to interpret and analyze findings by comparing them with the results of earlier research. Highlighting similarities and differences enhances the depth and understanding of the current results. Agreement with previous findings strengthens the study's credibility and

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objectivity, while divergence opens new research gaps and opportunities for further inquiry.

3 The Purpose of Reviewing Previous Studies: Reviewing previous studies and research serves several essential purposes. The knowledge derived from earlier works assists the researcher in determining the significance of the problem, designing the research framework, and linking the findings of the current study with those of earlier ones. The main objectives of reviewing previous studies can be summarized as follows:

3.1.Verifying the Novelty of the Research Problem : Through a thorough and systematic review of existing research, the researcher ensures that the problem has not been investigated before. This helps to avoid unintentional duplication of topics that have already been studied. During this process, the researcher may also discover certain aspects that still require further investigation and exploration. In such cases, conducting a new study becomes justified, as it contributes to the generation of new knowledge and adds to existing literature(Melhem, 2006, p. 98).

3.2 Defining the Research Problem

A comprehensive review of previous research enables the researcher to eliminate any ambiguity surrounding the research problem. This precision allows the problem to be clearly and scientifically formulated and submitted for in-depth investigation.In addition, this review contributes to clarifying the study's concepts and terminology, ensuring that they are measured, tested, and defined operationally within the appropriate methodological framework.

3.3. Placing the Study within a Historical Perspectiv: the cumulative nature of educational research means that knowledge in this field is built progressively through the accumulation of interrelated studies sharing certain characteristics.

Researchers develop understanding by building upon what earlier scholars have achieved, particularly in educational disciplines, by analyzing previous studies and exploring the relationships between them and the current research, the investigator can situate their study within the broader scientific context and explain how it contributes new insights to the field.

3.4.Revealing Contradictions in Previous Research

Sometimes, reviewing prior research reveals contradictions in findings. Although such inconsistencies might appear problematic, they are often positive in the field of educational research because they highlight new research gaps, differences in results may stem from variations in methodology, data collection tools, analytical approaches, or even interpretation styles among researchers. By identifying and analyzing these inconsistencies, the researcher is encouraged to investigate the issue from multiple perspectives, thereby enriching the academic discussion (Melhem, 2006). **3.5. Selecting the Appropriate Research Methodology:** investigating previous studies develops a deeper understanding of research quality and may

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lead the researcher to suggest alternative approaches to improve future studies, critical examination of earlier research can reveal weaknesses in design or methodology, prompting the researcher to propose new procedures, instruments, or techniques better suited to the problem. This process guides the researcher in choosing the most appropriate method for addressing the current study's objectives (Mohammed Bakr, Mohammed Mustafa, & Ferial, 2007).

3.6.Selecting Suitable Data Collection Instruments: Reviewing prior studies helps the researcher choose the most effective data collection tools corresponding to the research problem. Failures in previous research may be attributed to weak design or inappropriate instruments; thus, this review leads to improved and more reliable methodologies**,** resulting in higher-quality findings that are more objective and generalizable.

3.7.Discussing and Comparing Results : One of the essential steps in educational research involves discussing the results obtained and comparing them with those of previous studies. This process helps determine the new knowledge contributed by the current study and its distinction from earlier work, based on these comparisons, the researcher can propose future studies that expand the boundaries of current knowledge and offer recommendations for further exploration of the problem**.**

4. Sources of Obtaining Previous Studies: after defining the research problem, the researcher compiles a list of key terms that describe it. It is essential to identify the main concepts related to the topic, as these will be used when reviewing previous studies. For example, in a study about "the teacher's role in increasing students' motivation toward learning*,"* the main terms would include teacher*,* motivation, and students.

Once these terms are determined, the researcher moves to the sources of previous studies, which can be classified into three main categories: general (introductory) sources**,** primary sources**,** and secondary sources**.** In addition**,** electronic and international databases have become significant in modern research, in addition to seminars, scientific conferences, and books, these are among the most important sources that help researchers enrich the theoretical framework. Abu Alam (2004) and Abbas et al. (2006) indicate that the most important sources for obtaining previous studies are as follows:

4.1.General(Introductory) Sources

These are the initial references that guide the researcher toward locating relevant information about the research problem. They may be printed materials or digital databases, and they usually include indexes, bibliographies, abstracts, and directories that list authors' names, publication titles, and publishing details.

Examples of general sources important for educational research include:

- University thesis indexes for master's and doctoral dissertations.

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• Abstracts of academic theses available in university libraries, particularly in Arab institutions.

• Indexes of specialized journals and educational information centers that provide summaries of studies and research findings.

4.2.Primary Sources: Primary sources are original research works in which researchers publish their findings for the first time. These include peer-reviewed academic journals**,** university publications, and research reports issued by scientific institutions or research canters. Such sources are considered the most reliable because they present first-hand data and results derived from original fieldwork or experimentation. They serve as the primary foundation of scientific information in the field.

4.3. Secondary Sources: secondary sources refer to publications that describe, summarize, or interpret the work of others. They provide a secondary level of information by analyzing or reviewing what has already been published in primary sources.Forinstance, a textbook summarizing the results of previous studies in education or psychology is considered a secondary source**.** Examples include university course materials, scientific textbooks, and review papers addressing specific topics such as motivation, learning, or perception.

4.4.Electronic References:in contemporary research, it has become easy to access a large number of studies through Many authors and institutions now publish and distribute their work online. The Internet has greatly facilitated this process, enabling researchers to access a variety of digital sources.

However, using online materials requires specific research skills. Despite the advantages of electronic sources, they also present limitations — for instance, the absence of strict quality control, the lack of official publication data for some materials, and the difficulty of finding or properly citing certain online resources (Raja Mahmoud , 2004).

4.5. International Organizations and Databases: Many international andgovernmental organizations have taken on the mission of publishing and disseminating scientific research. These institutions often maintain extensive databases available online, offering researchers a valuable source of educational and academic materials.

Therefore it is crucial for researchers to know how to locate previous research in their field and to identify the organizations that manage such databases. They should also understand the structure and retrieval methods of these databases, as well as the cataloging systems used in libraries whether card catalogs, computer databases, or CD archives to efficiently access prior studies.

5. Steps for Reviewing Previous Studies: Abbas, Noufel, and others (2007) propose several recommendations to help researchers organize their review of previous studies effectively. These steps ensure systematic analysis, accuracy, and coherence in handling academic sources. The main steps are as follows:

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5.1.Start with the Most Recent Studies: The researcher should begin by reviewing the most recent studies in the field and then move backward to the older ones.

This reverse chronological order allows the researcher to observe how recent findings have corrected earlier misconceptions, refined methodologies, and introduced new approaches to data collection, additionally, recent studies often include extensive bibliographies that can lead the researcher to earlier foundational sources that might otherwise be overlooked.

5.2.Read Research Abstracts First:the researcher should first read the abstract or summary of each study to determine its relevance to the research problem. This saves time by avoiding unnecessary reading of irrelevant studies and allows focus on directly related works.

5.3.Review the Entire Report Selectively:once the study's relevance is confirmed, the researcher reviews specific sections of the full report that are most closely related to the research problem. This helps in understanding the study's objectives, methods, and outcomes in detail.

5.4.Take Notes on Index Cards:it is advisable to write notes on index cards rather than on loose sheets, as this facilitates easier organization, sorting, and cross-referencing later during the writing process.

5.5.Record Full Bibliographic Details: each card should include complete citation information (author, year, title, publication details). Only one source should be recorded per card to simplify alphabetical arrangement and referencing.

5.6.DifferentiateBetweenQuotation and Paraphrase:the researcher must distinguish between direct quotations taken from the original source and paraphrased ideas reformulated during note-taking. This distinction is crucial for maintaining academic integrity and accurate referencing.

5.7.Document Online Research Strategies:when using electronic databases or online resources, the researcher should document the search strategy used (keywords, databases, filters, etc.). Recording this information helps to retrieve data efficiently in the future and reduces research costs(Mohammed Bakr, Mohammed Mustafa, & Ferial, 2007, p. 116).

6. The Method of Presenting Previous Studies: After gathering what the researcher considers to be a sufficient number of previous studies related to the research topic, the next step is to organize and present them in a systematic manner. The researcher must determine how each study relates to the research problem, showing both the connections and differences between earlier studies and the current one**.**The reviewed studies form the theoretical background of the research. They should be presented in a way that clarifies the relationship between the current study and previous ones, highlighting similarities, differences, strengths, and weaknesses**.**

From a methodological perspective, it is generally recommended that researchers

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in educational and scientific studies follow **a** logical sequence when reviewing previous research. The main information that should be included in the summary of each study is as follows:

-The full name of the researcher.

-The year in which the study was conducted.

-The title and objectives of the study.

-A concise explanation of the research methodology, instruments, sample, and procedures.

-The main findings and recommendations.

-A footnote indicating the reference from which the study was taken.

6.1. Summarizing Previous Studies

According to Abo Allam (2004), summarizing previous studies should follow these main steps:

-Stating the title of the previous study.

-Indicating the institution or entity that conducted or supervised the study (whether it was an individual researcher, a research team, or an academic institution).

-Mentioning the period or year in which the study was conducted, with preference for the most recent works.

-Specifying the location or field in which the study was carried out.

-the duration of the study, since long-term studies differ from short-term ones.

-Clarifying the nature of the study—whether theoretical or field-based.

-Presenting the research problem or the central questions that guided the study.

-Explaining the research methodology, hypotheses, and the tools used, along with a description of the study sample.

_Outlining the main objectives of the research.

-Summarizing the major steps and procedures undertaken in the study.

-Highlighting the key results, emphasizing the scientific and methodological contributions made by the researcher(Raja Mahmoud , 2004, p. 107).

It is preferable that the researcher presents each previous study in paragraph form rather than as a list of titles, so as not to confuse the reader or examiner. Additionally, it is essential to include the reference in a footnote at the bottom of the page—without specifying the page numbers—since each summarized study is treated as a whole rather than as a citation from a specific section.

Example:

Susan Hamdi Hamed (2017) conducted a study titled "The Effectiveness of a Program Based on Marital Counseling in Developing Awareness of the Components of Marital Happiness among a Sample of University Youth."using an experimental method, she worked with a sample of 30 university students (15 males and 15 females), divided equally into an experimental group and a control group. The study used a marital happiness

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awareness scale and found statistically significant differences between the two groups in favor of the experimental group. These results confirmed the effectiveness of marital counselling in developing young people's awareness of the components of marital happiness

6.2. Evaluating Previous Studies

After summarizing the reviewed studies, the next step is to evaluate them. The researcher highlights the strengths and weaknesses of each study and assesses its scientific and practical contributions, this evaluation clarifies the value added by the study to the existing body of knowledge and identifies which aspects were insufficiently addressed, such as weaknesses in methodology, tools, or sample selection. The purpose is to avoid replicating errors and to build upon successful approaches.

6.3. Employing Previous Studies

At this stage, the researcher compares previous studies with the current one to determine what has been investigated and what remains unexplored. The goal is to position the new study within the broader field, showing what it adds to the existing knowledge and how it fills existing research gaps.The researcher should focus on the most relevant studies that directly support the topic, avoiding unnecessary accumulation of unrelated works. The emphasis should be on quality over quantity—selecting studies that serve the research problem and enhance theoretical and methodological clarity.

7. Classification of Previous Studies:when reviewing previous studies, it is advisable for the researcher to begin with the oldest research in order to show the historical progression of the topic under investigation. During the data collection phase, the researcher should follow a chronological order, beginning with earlier studies and then moving to the more recent ones.Previous studies can be classified in two principal ways:

7.1. Chronological (Temporal) Classification: it is commonly accepted that the researcher begins with older studies**,** tracing the evolution of research on the topic over time, and then proceeds to more recent works. This allows the researcher to observe the development of concepts, methodologies, and findings throughout different periods.

7.2. Thematic (Variable-Based) Classification:previous studies can also be classified according to the variables or themes addressed .For example, if the researcher wishes to study the problem of "the impact of private tutoring on the academic achievement of final-year high school students (baccalaureate level)," the classification could be organized as follows:

- **Axis1:** Studies dealing with private tutoring.
- **Axis2:** Studies dealing with academic achievement.
- **Axis3:** Studies addressing the effect of private tutoring on academic achievement.

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In many cases, the researcher may encounter a large number of previous studies and face difficulty deciding which ones to include. To make a sound selection, the researcher can apply the following criteria**:**

-Choose the most recent and most directly relevant studies to the topic.

-Select studies based on the methodology, instruments, and sample used for data collection.

-Consider the scientific reputation and credibility of the researcher or research institution.

Conclusion

Through the preceding sections, we have sought to highlight the theoretical and practical importance of reviewing previous studies as an essential element of any scientific research, regardless of its nature.This process helps the researcher define the research problem more clearly, formulate appropriate hypotheses, and position the study within the broader context of prior research. It also enables the researcher to avoid unnecessary repetition and redundancy.

A researcher undertaking this step must focus not only on collecting previous works but also on analyzing, interpreting, and utilizing them effectively. It is not enough to gather a large quantity of studies; the key is to ensure that the selected works are qualitatively relevant and contribute meaningfully to the research.Moreover, the presentation of previous studies should be organized in a way that helps the reader understand the field of inquiry and recognize the significance of the researcher's problem as one truly worthy of study.

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