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How to employ previous studies in scientific research

كيفية توظيف الدراسات السابقة في البحث العلمي

Comment utiliser les études antérieures dans la recherche scientifique

Nadjet Korichi - University Kasdi Merbah Ouargla

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NADJET KORICHI

UNIVERSITY KASDI MERBAH OUARGLA

Introduction

The importance of presenting previous studies lies in constructing a theoretical framework for the research topic, thereby benefiting from the work of others and learning from their mistakes. Therefore, the process of incorporating previous studies serves to clarify the extent to which the researcher understands and benefits from these studies, while also emphasizing their relevance to the research topic. It is important to note that utilizing previous studies is not a random process or an additional element in scientific research; rather, it is a structured process governed by methodological principles. However, it is often observed that previous studies are neglected in research, with some researchers only referring to them after completing their own research, considering them to be unnecessary.

From this perspective, this work aims to address the issue of how to effectively employ previous studies in scientific and sociological research, organized into several sections: the first section focuses on the importance of previous studies, the second discusses how to present these studies, along with common mistakes encountered during their review, the third section examines how researchers can benefit from previous studies, the fourth compares the researcher's study with previous studies, and the final section evaluates previous studies, with examples provided for clarification.

1. The Importance of Previous Studies

Scientific research, whether theoretical or applied, represents an integrated and interconnected structure, with the different parts of the research functioning in support of one another. A researcher who builds upon the work of others will undoubtedly be more creative and capable of contributing new knowledge. In contrast, a researcher who begins from scratch, as if no prior research had been conducted, may find their efforts disappointing in light of the existing body of knowledge. As the saying goes, science is cumulative: if researchers continually started from scratch without considering previous work, no progress would have been made, and the

scientific and technological advancements of today would not have been possible (Ammar & Al-Thanibat, 2007, p. 33). Previous studies contribute to the following:

- Clarifying the research problem and defining its dimensions and scope: By reviewing the studies and research conducted on the topic, the researcher can avoid duplicating previous work and avoid the pitfalls others have encountered, leading to the identification of a relevant and worthwhile research problem.
- Enriching the research problem with knowledge, studies, hypotheses, assumptions, and conclusions drawn by others.
- Providing important sources and references for the researcher's own work (Ismail, 2018, p. 4).

The theoretical review of previous studies also helps to assess the strength of the theoretical framework of the subject, which can be modified based on environmental changes that may require adjustments to theoretical foundations and hypotheses.

2. Reviewing Previous Studies

Previous research is presented in various formats. It may be organized in chronological order, starting with the most recent research, or in reverse chronological order, beginning with the oldest studies. It can also be organized alphabetically by the names of researchers (Ibrahim, 2021, p. 324). Alternatively, the studies can be categorized based on their field, with foreign studies presented first, followed by Arabic studies, and then local studies, and so on.

In short, a good researcher is one who can present previous studies in a way that includes all the steps followed in these studies: research questions, hypotheses, methodology, tools, and so on. It is preferable that these steps are presented in an organized and unified manner, as follows:

- Study Title
- Nature of the Study (e.g., Master's thesis, doctoral dissertation, study published in scientific journals, etc.)
- Name of the organization that conducted the study or the study's author, and the year the study was conducted.
- Country where the study was conducted.
- Study Questions

- Hypotheses
- Research Approach used.
- Data collection tools and their application.
- Study sample and its characteristics.
- Clarification of the key concepts in the study.
- Brief description of the contents of the study (including theoretical and field aspects and the chapters it includes).
- Presentation of the most significant findings of the study (Muhammad Sarhan, 2015, p. 106).

Thus, presenting previous studies by following all these steps will provide a clear and comprehensive understanding of everything covered in those studies, facilitating the process of benefiting from them.

3. Avoiding Common Mistakes

One common mistake researchers make when reviewing previous studies is to begin by saying, « I haven't found a writer or researcher who has written about this topic before, » or « There is only this on the subject. »

Additionally, some researchers only read a small part of previous studies and then claim, « The author of the study did not do justice to the subject. »

In the face of these negative attitudes toward previous research, the researcher must avoid using negative language, such as saying, « It isn't there, » « It doesn't exist, » or « I didn't find it. » Rather, the researcher must read the works of others thoroughly and completely. The researcher should not be content with only consulting specific chapters or browsing through the table of contents.

For researchers dealing with large or extensive works, it is crucial to avoid issuing unfounded judgments about these works without providing sufficient evidence. Instead, the researcher should carefully review the sub-headings and present the contributions of predecessors to the topic in a concise or direct manner. This approach allows the reader to compare others' contributions and assess the scope of the problem studied by the researcher. The reader can then evaluate the shortcomings of previous studies and determine the need for the research proposed by the researcher.

In all cases, the review of previous studies can only be completed satisfactorily through analysis, which involves classifying, compiling, arranging, and organizing the information according to the main divisions

of topics previously established by the researcher. This method leads the reader to the point from which the researcher begins their study, ensuring that there is a central idea aligned with the study's problem, around which the information derived from previous studies revolves (Morris, 2004, p. 132).

4. The Researcher's Benefit from Previous Studies

This section addresses how the researcher benefits from previous studies. These benefits may involve forming a theoretical background on the research topic, highlighting a key aspect of the study for further investigation, or drawing attention to focus on a specific aspect. The researcher can use previous studies to help formulate the research problem. Additionally, previous studies may assist in selecting the most appropriate research methodology. The method followed in prior studies may reveal which approach is most suitable for studying the topic at hand. It is also crucial to acknowledge the most important benefit : the researcher's use of the results from previous studies. This is especially relevant when analyzing study data and comparing the results of the current study with those of earlier studies.

In all cases, the researcher must refer to and benefit from these studies when analyzing the data collected, whether the analysis is qualitative, quantitative, or both. Analysis and interpretation are at the core of research, as they represent the creative aspect of scientific inquiry. The function of analysis is to summarize the collected data in a way that answers the research questions, while interpretation provides a comprehensive explanation by linking the findings to existing knowledge (Ibrahim, 2021, pp. 327-328).

For instance, a study on « Organizational Values and Their Relationship to Organizational Effectiveness » illustrates how the researcher benefited from previous studies in the following ways :

- From previous studies, the researcher realized that studying effectiveness requires a holistic approach encompassing all organizational dimensions (inputs, processes, outputs, environment), rather than focusing on just one dimension.
- The researcher was guided in choosing the appropriate methodology to study organizational effectiveness and in forming a theoretical foundation for the topic.
- Some studies highlighted the cultural aspect of individuals within organizations, which led the researcher to focus on organizational values as one of the key cultural elements and their relationship to the research topic.

- The study also benefited from the questionnaire design methodology used in previous research and the aspects included in each section.
- Furthermore, the researcher used the results of prior studies to analyze the data and compare the findings with those of the current study (Najat, 2007, p. 14).

Therefore, previous studies help the researcher deduce and establish relationships between ideas by logically linking them and reshaping them to provide new insights.

5. Comparison Between the Researcher's Study and Previous Studies

This section deals with areas of agreement and disagreement between the researcher's study and previous studies, focusing on the purpose, scope, and the relationship between them.

The researcher identifies areas of agreement between their study and previous research by highlighting shared aspects, such as the same topic, research approach, or methodology. Common aspects are helpful for comparing the results of previous studies with those of the current study, and they also assist in analyzing the results.

As for the differences, they can be explained in terms of purpose and scope as follows:

- In terms of purpose: Each researcher has a unique goal for their study. Even if previous research covers the same topic, it likely has a different purpose, which distinguishes one study from another. By contrasting the goals of the current study with those of previous studies, the researcher can clarify how their study is unique and what new contributions it offers.
- In terms of scope: The researcher must explain the differences between their study's field and the fields covered by prior studies. The « field » refers to the geographical location of the study (e.g., if the previous study was conducted internationally) or the specific setting (e.g., an industrial institution, an educational organization, etc.). Differences in field may lead to varying results, even if the same topic, approach, and methodology were used. These differences require explanation and interpretation. In the previous example, the researcher addressed the similarities and differences between their study and earlier research as follows:

5.1. Areas of Agreement Between the Researcher's Study and Previous Studies

The areas of agreement include several key aspects:

- The second and fourth studies align with the researcher's study in their treatment of the topic of organizational effectiveness.
- The first study agrees with the researcher's study by examining organizational values across four dimensions: (management of management, mission management, relationship management, environment management) and using the values questionnaire developed by "Dave Francis and Mike Wood Cook."
- The third study shares similarities with the researcher's study in focusing on organizational values such as hard work, discipline, mastery of work, resource rationalization, human relations, and concern for the environment.
- The second study also aligns with the researcher's study by studying organizational effectiveness in a comprehensive manner.
- The fourth study shares a focus on the organizational cultural aspects of effectiveness.

The previous four studies also share the methodological approach of using a descriptive analytical approach and employing a questionnaire as the primary data collection tool.

5.2. Differences Between the Researcher's Study and Previous Studies

The differences in terms of purpose and scope can be explained as follows:

1. In terms of purpose: The four previous studies aimed to:
 - Identify employees' perceptions of organizational values and their relationship with personal variables (e.g., academic qualifications, experience) and performance efficiency.
 - Study organizational effectiveness within the public education sector in Saudi Arabia, considering the system's inputs, operations, outputs, and interaction with the environment.
 - Examine how organizational members practice the core values affirmed by senior management according to the perceptions of senior and middle management, and to determine the relationship

between the practice of organizational values and variables such as age, seniority, educational level, and job level.

- Investigate the attitudes of middle management toward organizational cultural models (entitlement, evolutionary, scientific, and legal).

The researcher's study aims to explore the attitudes of responsible frameworks toward prevailing organizational values and their relationship to organizational effectiveness, through internal and external indicators.

2. In terms of scope: The four previous studies focused on various fields:

- Medical services at the Ministry of Defense and Aviation (Riyadh).
- The general education sector in the western region of Saudi Arabia (Jeddah, Mecca, Taif), focusing on the secondary level.
- Isbat Foundation (formerly Cedar) in Annaba.
- A production institution and a group of service institutions in Annaba.

The researcher's field of study is an industrial institution: the Electrical Cable Industries Corporation in Biskra (Najat, 2007, p. 15).

Conclusion

After discussing the aspects of agreement and disagreement, as shown in the previous example, the researcher should address the relationship between their study and prior research. This relationship can be complementary, where the researcher's study builds upon or adds to previous work. For example, the researcher may focus on an aspect that was not addressed in earlier studies, or they may begin their investigation from a point already reached by previous researchers. This complementary relationship can significantly enhance the originality and relevance of the new study, providing a clearer understanding of the research topic.

Furthermore, the relationship between the researcher's study and prior research can also be contradictory, if the results or approaches differ significantly. In such cases, it is essential for the researcher to critically analyze these differences, explaining the reasons behind them and exploring possible factors that might account for the discrepancies, such as methodological differences or variations in the study population.

Additionally, the researcher's study may extend previous research, offering new insights or examining the topic from a fresh perspective. This can involve applying a new methodology, exploring a different geographical area, or examining the topic at a more detailed level. By extending previous research, the researcher contributes to the ongoing scholarly dialogue, pushing the boundaries of current knowledge.

In conclusion, the researcher must not only present a thorough analysis of the relationships between their study and previous research but also demonstrate how their work fits into the broader academic landscape. Whether the relationship is complementary, contradictory, or extends previous research, the researcher's work should offer valuable contributions that advance understanding in the field. Careful and thoughtful consideration of past studies ensures that the researcher's study is grounded in existing knowledge while also offering new perspectives that further the development of the field.

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Abstract

Previous studies are an integral part of any scientific research, as they assist the researcher in developing a theoretical framework for the research topic on one hand, and in identifying the methods and methodological procedures used to study the topic on the other. This article aims to highlight the importance of previous studies and how to effectively employ them in scientific research, emphasizing that their role is just as important as any other step in the research process. By doing so, researchers save time and effort and avoid the mistakes made by others.

Keywords

Previous studies, scientific research

مستخلص

تعتبر الدراسات السابقة جزءاً لا يتجزأ من أي بحث علمي، حيث تساعد الباحث على تكوين خلفية نظرية حول موضوع البحث من جهة، وتساعد أيضاً في التعرف على الطرق والإجراءات المنهجية المستخدمة لدراسة الموضوع من جهة أخرى. يهدف هذا المقال إلى توضيح أهمية

الدراسات السابقة وكيفية توظيفها بفعالية في البحوث العلمية، مع التأكيد على أن دورها لا يقل أهمية عن أي خطوة أخرى من خطوات البحث العلمي. يساعد ذلك الباحث على توفير الوقت والجهد وتجنب الوقوع في الأخطاء التي ارتكبتها باحثون آخرون.

كلمات مفتاحية

الدراسات السابقة، البحوث العلمية

Résumé

Les études antérieures constituent une composante essentielle de toute recherche scientifique, car elles permettent au chercheur de constituer une base théorique sur le sujet de recherche, d'une part, et de comprendre les méthodes et procédures méthodologiques employées pour étudier ce sujet, d'autre part. Cet article vise à démontrer l'importance des études antérieures et à expliquer comment les utiliser efficacement dans la recherche scientifique, en soulignant que leur rôle est aussi crucial que celui de toute autre étape du processus de recherche. Cela permet au chercheur de gagner du temps et de l'énergie, tout en évitant de reproduire les erreurs commises par d'autres chercheurs.

Mots-clés

Études antérieures, recherche scientifique