



LIBRARY

Handout Video SLA 0: Looking for Literature and Research

When it comes to carrying out research, looking for specialist literature is perhaps not the first thing you think of. Nonetheless, specialist literature such as books or journal articles is very important for every research project. In this film, I will show you when, during your research project, you should start looking for literature and why you should do so.

You might be tempted to start working straight away with interviews, surveys, or experiments, for example. This would not be a good idea. In fact the phase before all this, the initial phase, is very important.

First, you determine exactly what it is you are going to research and you draw up a plan on how you will do so. Looking for literature is always part of this initial phase. The actual carrying out of your research comes after that. You start looking for literature as soon as you begin to explore a subject which interests you.

The literature you find helps you define the scope of your subject and to think up your preliminary research questions. By gaining more in-depth knowledge of the theoretical aspects of your subject, you can find out which questions you need to be asking during your research.

During the second round, you conduct a more in-depth search for literature and write a critical literature overview, also known as a theoretical framework. Herewith you show which relevant research has already been carried out. After all, you want to avoid re-inventing the wheel.

In the process, you look at the value of previous research in relation to your own:

- what exactly has been researched
- do they have the same outcome, or do they contradict each other.
- are the research methods that were used suitable for your own research?

In your theoretical framework, you describe the concepts, or key terms, that are used. If your research is about the link between improving return-of-sale services and customer satisfaction, then return of sale services and customer satisfaction are examples of concepts.

In many cases, a simple definition will not be enough. By searching, you will discover, for example, that customer satisfaction is determined by a number of factors: price, quality, service, etc. These are sub-concepts. You could perhaps use a chart to illustrate how they may be interrelated. Making them researchable and measurable is the next step. By carefully researching the theory, you will ensure that you have not left out any essential concepts or variables.

After this second search phase, there is a good chance that you will be able to define your research problem and your research questions even more accurately.

So, looking for literature is always part of the initiation phase of research. It can also form part of the execution phase, when you carry out your actual research.



LIBRARY

A literature search is sometimes used as a research method in its own right during this execution phase. It involves you combining, analysing, and comparing existing literature. At the end of your research, you always relate your research results to existing literature.

In many cases, it will be necessary to keep looking for literature during the execution and analysis of your research. So, when doing research, do not throw yourself in the deep end but rather spend plenty of time on the initial phase.

First get an idea of what exactly you are going to research and how it supplements existing research. And, be aware of the fact that looking for literature is an essential part of that process.