

Cognitive and Methodological Benefits of Utilising Previous Studies in Social Research

المكاسب المعرفية والمنهجية لاستخدام الدراسات السابقة في البحوث الاجتماعية

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Abstract:

This study explores the cognitive and methodological advantages of integrating previous research into social science investigations. Conducting a comprehensive literature review allows researchers to sharpen their research focus, clearly define relevant problems and dimensions, and build upon established findings. This step constitutes an essential component for ensuring the rigour and validity of any research project. This paper explains the importance of previous studies, categorises their types, examines the contexts in which they apply, and outlines ways to incorporate them into new research. Moreover, it delineates the intellectual and practical gains that assist researchers in navigating both conceptual and methodological aspects. These benefits support the development of

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a well-structured research framework and help prevent common methodological errors found in earlier studies. Key conclusions include:

- Previous studies contribute significantly to enhancing cognitive understanding and providing methodological direction.
- They help researchers address and overcome methodological challenges.
- They improve comprehension of the research topic and clarify its various dimensions.

Keywords

previous studies, cognitive benefits, methodological benefits, literature review, social research.

المخلص

تهدف الدراسة الى تقصي المكاسب المعرفية والمنهجية في توظيف الدراسات السابقة في البحوث الاجتماعية ، حيث تمكن مراجعة الأدبيات والدراسات الباحث من بلورة موضوعه وتحديد اشكاليته وأبعاده والاستفادة من النتائج التي توصل اليها الباحثون ، وهي من أهم الخطوات المنهجية التي يتبعها الباحث في دراسته ولا يمكن أن يتجاهلها أو يتجاوزها ، فنحاول في هذه الورقة البحثية توضيح دلالة الدراسات السابقة وأنواعها وأهميتها وسياقات توظيفها و كيفية عرضها و المكاسب المعرفية والمنهجية التي تساهم في توجيه البحث معرفيا ومنهجيا ليتسنى للباحث وضع التصور العام لدراسته وتجنب الأخطاء والبهفوات المنهجية التي وقع فيها الباحثين الآخرون

ومن أهم النتائج التي توصلنا اليها :

- ✓ للدراسات السابقة دور مهم في توجيه البحث معرفيا ومنهجيا .
- ✓ تساعد الباحث في تجاوز الصعوبات والأخطاء المنهجية .
- ✓ بلورة الموضوع ومعرفة أبعاد الظاهرة .

الكلمات المفتاحية

الدراسات السابقة ، المكاسب المعرفية والمنهجية ، التوظيف ، البحوث الاجتماعية

1. Introduction

Previous studies represent one of the most critical methodological foundations in scientific research. Researchers expect to consider them carefully, given their substantial academic value and the numerous benefits they provide to the researcher and the research itself. Social research, by nature, is cumulative; therefore, selecting research topics, whether for master's theses, doctoral dissertations, or other scholarly projects, requires a thorough

review of relevant literature and existing studies. This task demands a systematic organisation and classification of information drawn from the existing body of knowledge related to the topic under investigation,

However, reviewing and utilising previous studies often suffers from notable shortcomings. Researchers may inadequately present these studies or fail to articulate the cognitive and methodological value they offer. As a result, they frequently fall into methodological errors, such as neglecting to follow established research guidelines or failing to situate their current study in relation to prior work. Proper engagement with previous studies enables the researcher to refine their research focus, articulate a clear problem statement, avoid redundancy by steering clear of previously addressed propositions, and open new avenues for inquiry by contributing fresh insights,

Accordingly, this paper aims to clarify the significance of previous studies, highlight their academic value, outline their key purposes, and identify the primary cognitive and methodological benefits they offer

The guiding research question is: What intellectual and methodological benefits can researchers gain by reviewing and integrating previous studies into their research?

2. Definition of Key Concepts

This section provides definitions of key concepts central to the study:.

Previous studies: These are defined as the examination and evaluation of existing scientific works, enabling others to understand the strengths and limitations of these contributions concerning the research topic (Ammar Bahoush, 2011, p. 33).

Reviewing previous studies helps researchers to develop a clear understanding of their topic and identify the components essential for inclusion in their research. The

collection, classification, organisation, and application of previous studies constitute a significant methodological task that demands vigilance and critical appraisal to situate the current research within the evolving landscape of academic inquiry.

Cognitive and methodological gains: Refer to the intellectual and practical benefits researchers derive from reviewing, compiling, and applying previous studies in their current work. Such benefits include clarifying the research topic, generating new insights, , providing theoretical and methodological guidance, informing instrument development, and contextualising findings about earlier studies.

Employment: This term refers to the process where researchers collect relevant previous studies from libraries and databases, organise them systematically , and use them to understand how the research topic appears across different geographical and temporal contexts. It includes reviewing studies from broad to narrow perspectives (e.g., international, regional, and local research)

Social research: Defined as a purposeful and systematic process of inquiry that seeks to generate new knowledge, social research explores and extends the boundaries of existing understanding, increases confidence in findings, and produces novel results applicable

across various aspects of life (Sarantakos, 2017, p. 59)

3. Importance of the Study

This study is significant because it focuses on one of the most vital stages in scientific research: reviewing previous studies. Such studies serve as a crucial methodological and cognitive benchmark within the knowledge production process of any research project. They provide a structured framework Finally, that enables researchers to organise information systematically, broaden their understanding of the topic, and mitigate methodological errors commonly encountered during the literature review process.

4. Objectives of the Study

To clarify the concept of previous studies, their various types, and their academic significance

To identify the principal cognitive and methodological benefits of employing previous studies in research

5. Defining Previous Studies

The systematic examination and critical evaluation of previous studies exposes the researcher to a wealth of information and data relevant to their topic. This process clarifies both the cognitive and methodological dimensions of the subject under investigation, emphasising that previous studies enrich the experience of researchers. Accordingly, Sulaiman defines the Previous Studies as "summarising research outcomes, identifying methodologies and tools employed, and exploring the challenges researchers faced along with their solutions". (Suleiman, 2009, p. 67)

Moreover, previous studies represent "the body of scholarly work related to the research topic, which may relate directly or indirectly to the current study. Some studies may have a comprehensive, direct connection, while others might contribute partially or tangentially to the topic" (Moatouq, 2012, p. 60)

Anthony Giddens describes previous studies as "the process of reviewing available evidence within a given field," which academically may clarify aspects of the topic or provide conclusions, provided that contextual factors are duly considered (Giddens, 2005, p. 671).

Similarly, Ibrahim Al-Tawhami defines them as "all scholarly contributions related to the research topic, submitted for academic degrees (Master or Doctorate) financial remuneration, or simply for scientific contribution" (al, 1999, p. 104)

Maurice Angers views previous studies as "a thorough, organised, and comprehensive examination of published documents related to a specific topic" (Angers, 2006, p. 125).

Therefore, previous studies encompass all theoretical and empirical heritage concerning the phenomenon under investigation. Researchers rely on primary sources, such as theses and dissertations, to develop a cognitive and methodological grasp of their topic, thus transitioning from abstract conceptualisation to concrete understanding. Consequently, previous studies serve as both a guide and a foundational framework, unifying methodological and conceptual considerations.

6. Types of Previous Studies:

Previous studies vary in nature and source. The following categorisation summarises the main types:

Theoretical Studies (Primary Sources): These consist of scholarly works derived

from historical and legislative texts, where researchers collect, examine, and critique relevant theoretical materials directly related to their topic

Field Studies: It involves the collection of empirical data through observation or experimentation. Researchers distinguish their findings from previous studies by discussing their specific methods and scientific evidence (al, 1999, p. 105)

Another classification differentiates studies as follows:

Free Studies : These include accessible library resources such as books, manuscripts, articles reports, and statistical data.

Academic Studies: consist of university-level research outputs, including theses, dissertations, and specialised research projects within Framework institutions.

7. The Importance of Previous Studies in Social Research

Reviewing previous studies is fundamental for identifying emerging topics and research problems that enrich and advance social science inquiry. (Angers, 2006, p. 125) states, every research project builds upon prior work, making it essential to review existing literature and identify previously completed studies relevant to the topic.

A comprehensive literature review elucidates the cognitive and methodological aspects of the phenomenon under study. The benefits of consulting previous research include:

- Gaining insight into the historical background of the research topic.
- Understanding which variables have proven significant or insignificant within the field (Al-Damen, 2009, صفحة 83)
- Clarifying relationships among studied variables
- Establishing the cognitive foundations upon which the basics of the research problem and its importance are
- Defining key concepts and their interrelations to formulate research hypotheses (Al-Damen, 2009, p. 86) .
- Guiding the selection of appropriate methodologies and research designs for data analysis.
- Determining the geographical, demographic, and temporal parameters critical for recognising significant changes affecting the phenomenon.

- As Boumediene Makhlouf pointed out. "The culture of methodological practice helps the researcher employ appropriate tools in the study " (Boumediene ; 2022 ;p527)

Researchers also emphasise the distinctiveness of their study by highlighting differences from previous research, identifying theoretical and methodological limitations in earlier works, and explaining how their research addresses these gaps. It clarifies differences in research questions, hypotheses, methodology, instruments, samples, and theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, researchers discuss how their findings compare with prior studies, thereby contributing scientifically and methodologically to the discipline

In summary, previous studies are indispensable in shaping social research, offering essential cognitive and methodological guidance throughout the investigative process.

8. Cognitive and Methodological Contexts of Previous Studies

In the social sciences, researchers follow a set of methodological steps that shape and refine their study topics. One of the most crucial steps is reviewing previous studies and relevant literature. This step is indispensable, as it contributes directly to constructing the cognitive and methodological frameworks of the research.

A thorough review of previous work allows the researcher to gain intellectual and procedural insights into the topic. These gains include:

- **Directing the Researcher's Reading:** Gathering data about the topic's structure and the interrelations of concepts enhances the researcher's understanding and strengthens the project's credibility (Sarantakos, 2017, p. 286).
- **This process enriches the topic and helps define its methodological direction.** The researcher organises this information, identifies key insights, and distinguishes between differing viewpoints, thus refining their research questions.
- **Providing Access to Sources and References:** Reviewing previous studies introduces the researcher to relevant references. These sources help deepen the researcher's knowledge and enrich the study.

- **Shaping the Theoretical Framework:** Literature reviews help define the theoretical part. The researcher adjusts this framework to reflect environmental or contextual developments that may affect the study's hypotheses or foundations (Lalam, 2017, p. 95).
- **Formulating New Ideas:** An analytical review of previous studies sharpens the researcher's thinking and allows them to construct new concepts.
- **Guiding Problem Construction and Hypothesis Formulation:** Prior studies help clarify the current research problem, highlight similarities with past work, and shape the conceptual and analytical frameworks. They also inspire the researcher with new ideas and methods for gathering and selecting relevant data.
- **Identifying Intellectual Trends:** Every research project aligns with a broader intellectual tradition. Previous work on related topics reveals these traditions and helps the researcher position their study within or against them (Raymond Kivi, 1996, p. 60)
- **Recognising Methodological Procedures:** Reviewing related studies enables the researcher to choose a suitable methodological approach if prior studies rely on a historical-analytical method. For example, the researcher may adapt and apply this method in their work.
- **Understanding Research Challenges:** By examining earlier studies, the researcher becomes aware of the obstacles others have faced and how they addressed them. It helps avoid repeating past errors and facilitates smoother research design.
- **Evaluating Research Tools:** Prior studies reveal the tools others have used, allowing the researcher to assess their relevance and effectiveness. These tools may be reused, modified, or rejected based on their fit for the current study.
- **Structuring the Research Plan:** Previous studies often provide models for organising and categorising research components, offering the researcher a clear path for structuring their study.

- **Defining the Research Population and Sample:** Literature reviews introduce the researcher to various research communities and samples, helping to determine the appropriate sampling technique for the study.
- **Facilitating Result Interpretation:** Familiarity with previous studies makes interpreting current results easier. The researcher can compare findings, highlight consistencies or discrepancies, and explain why their results align or differ. In both cases, the researcher reflects on next steps and potential directions for future inquiry.

Furthermore, intellectual and methodological elements guide the researcher in selecting a title, framing a research problem, defining its dimensions, and grounding it in a theoretical context. This process involves producing and discussing results that contribute meaningfully to the field.

9. How to Review Previous Studies

The method for presenting previous studies varies depending on the research goals.

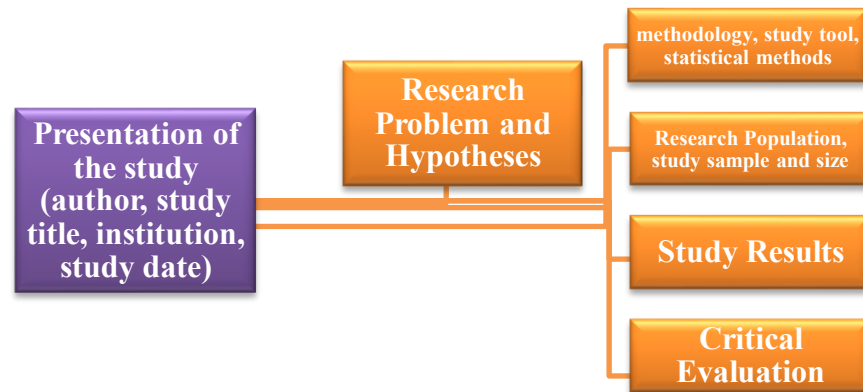
The researcher may choose from several strategies:

- A chronological presentation, either descending (from newest to oldest) or ascending (from oldest to newest).
- An alphabetical presentation (Belkacem Sultania, 2017, p. 99).
- A geographical or regional classification that arranges studies from the most general to the most specific: foreign, Arab, and local (e.g., Algerian) sources.

To effectively process and present previous studies, the researcher follows these steps (al, 1999, p. 107):

- Compile and list all previous studies, assigning each component of the material to separate index cards or digital notes
- Develop a conceptual framework that organises the main categories of reviewed literature.
- Identify the proposed research's contribution by demonstrating how it adds new dimensions, whether through fresh data, reinterpretation of findings, or theoretical critique
- Address and critique the limitations of previous work, whether methodological or substantive.

- Highlight key findings and arguments without distortion, ensuring the essential contributions of each study are respected and represented.



By applying these steps, the researchers shape their work in a Coherent, rigorous, and informed academic context that aligns with the broader scholarly conversation while pushing its boundaries

9.1. Methodological Approach to Utilising Previous Studies:

In social research, scholars adopt specific methodological approaches to incorporate and present previous studies. The choice of approach often varies depending on the researcher's intellectual orientation, objectives, and the extent to which they aim to emphasise or justify the similarities and differences between their study and existing literature. Accordingly, researchers structure their literature review using a framework that best aligns with their research focus. The following figure outlines the methodological process of engaging with previous studies:

Figure 1. Methodology of presenting previous studies prepared by researchers

- **Presentation of the Study:** The researcher begins by providing essential bibliographic information about the previous study, including the author's name, title, type of study (e.g., master's thesis, doctoral dissertation, or journal article), institutional affiliation (faculty, department, university), and the year and place of publication

- **Research Problem and Hypotheses:** This section succinctly outlines the main research problems, key questions, and hypotheses, defining its conceptual scope and primary focus areas.
- **Methodology:** The researcher summarises the study's design, data collection methods, and the statistical techniques applied to analyse the results
- **Study Results:** This part presents the findings, emphasising their significance and contribution to the field.
- **Critical Evaluation:** The researcher offers a critical appraisal of the previous study about the work. It includes assessing its methodological strengths and limitations, highlighting gaps, and explaining how the current study builds upon or diverges from it.

Avoid the stilted expression, "One of us (R. B. G.) thanks..." Instead, try "R. B. G. thanks". Do NOT put sponsor acknowledgements in the unnumbered footnote on the first page, but at here.

Conclusion:

This paper highlights the critical cognitive and methodological benefits of systematically reviewing and integrating previous studies into new research. Such engagement helps researchers sharpen their focus, clarify key concepts, and situate their work within the broader scholarly context. It also facilitates a more nuanced interpretation of findings and enhances the overall quality and credibility of the research.

The success of a study largely depends on the researcher's ability to apply these methodological steps. Reviewing prior literature is an indispensable part of the research process and must be approached with critical insight and academic rigor.

❖ **Key Takeaways**

- ❖ Previous studies provide foundational guidance for shaping research questions and methodologies.
- ❖ They help researchers avoid common methodological errors.
- ❖ They refine the research focus and deepen understanding of the subject matter

Recommendations

Researchers should conduct literature reviews with diligence and critical thinking. Academic knowledge is cumulative, and meaningful progress is achieved by thoughtfully building upon existing scholarship

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