Applications and Websites for Writing the Literature Review

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Abstract:

The present research aims to familiarize EFL learners and researchers with some beneficial applications and websites that can be used in the different steps of writing the literature review of dissertations. The selection of the applications and websites described hereby is based upon a survey distributed to EFL learners/researchers and through which they distinguished the ones they are familiar with from those they do not use. Consequently, the researchers decided to portray the ones that learners ignore to arouse their awareness and academic benefit.

Keywords: Applications, Websites, Literature Review, EFL researchers, Dissertation writing.

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تعريف متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية والباحثين في نفس المجال على بعض التطبيقات المفيدة والمواقع الالكترونية التي يمكن استخدامها في الخطوات المختلفة لكتابة الجانب النظري من رسائل البحث. ويستند اختيار التطبيقات والمواقع الالكترونية المذكورة في هذا البحث إلى دراسة استقصائية وزعت على متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية والباحثين في نفس المجال، ميزوا من خلالها بين التطبيقات والمواقع التي يعرفونها عن تلك التي لا يستخدمونها.ونتيجة لذلك ، قرر الباحثون التركيز على تلك التي يتجاهلها المتعلمون لتوعيتهم وزيادة منفعتهم الأكاديمية.

الكلمات الرئيسية: التطبيقات ، مواقع الإنترنت ، الجانب النظري ، باحثي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية ،كتابة الأطروحة.

1.   Introduction

Writing the literature review is a crucial step in writing dissertations; it reflects the researchers' background knowledge related to the topic of study together with the significance of the topic itself, it does not only present previous studies in the field but it also helps researchers develop their own arguments, their sense of reflection with the ability to think critically. However, despite its paramount importance, researchers should not waste much time writing the literature review, instead they should focus on the study itself. Thus, researchers need to find suitable related information to back up their research without committing plagiarism, and without wasting much time and energy. This can be reached through resorting to the use of the rapidly developing technologies, in general, and computer applications and websites, in particular.

2.   Background to the Study

In research methodology, the phrase 'Literature Review' or 'Review of Literature' refers to the act of synthesizing and organizing the knowledge available in a particular area or field of investigation to back up the study in hand, to well define the research problem, and to be critical, creative and original. Henceforth, a failure in reporting previous literature would result in shallowly work which is unsignificant. In this sense, the significance of the literature review lies in directing researchers in their study, updating their information about the existing literature, helping them to avoid replication yet to benefit from others' experiences to set both the problem and the rationale of study (Dawson, 2002; Singh, 2006). Multiple sources may be used to write the literature review, they include: books and text-books material, periodicals, abstracts, Encyclopedias, Handbooks, specialized dictionaries, ERIC (Educational, Research Information Centre), dissertations and theses, newspapers… (Singh, 2006 pp. 40- 43). The literature review most of the time appears as a separate section at the beginning of the thesis, yet, it could be integrated throughout the paper (McKay, 2006).

Steps or phases of the literature review include gathering data, combining resources, and polishing.

1.   Gathering Data; this phase includes searching, finding and identifying material that is relevant to the field of investigation, then reading it with more focus on the parts with which the researcher is not familiar. This phase could be further described in terms of specific procedures. First, researchers have to develop a deep understanding of the field of investigation, in general, and the variables of the study, in particular, through looking for the meaning and the

nature of the concepts and variables in general sources (Singh, 2006). Second, empirical research of the area should be reviewed through consulting "handbook of research, Encyclopedia of Educational Research, the Review of Educational Research and International Abstracts for more up to-date findings" (Singh, 2006 p. 38).

However, researchers should be aware of the fact that some information available over the internet can be incorrect and misleading, and therefore, should test its reliability through using trustful websites, checking the section 'about us' to find about the creator of the website, and use original and other sources to check the information (Dawson, 2002; Booth et al. 1995). By this stage, researchers would gain specific details and form a clear vision in the field. However, researchers should develop skills of skimming and scanning to be able to read at high speed.

2.   Combining Resources; this phase comprises the actual writing of a report that is beneficial for both the researcher and the reader; the former establishes a background for his research work, and the latter benefits from a summary of the findings in a particular area of research. Similar to the previous phase, specific procedures can be tracked in this phase. First, researchers should take notes systematically using cards; each entry should be recorded separately, content on one side of the card, and the reference with complete bibliographic data on the other side of the card. Details about quoted passages, instances of paraphrasing and summarizing should be carefully and clearly noted (Booth et al., 1995; Singh, 2006). Then, they should select only useful and necessary notes to be reported precisely. The latter is a creative and difficult task, and to accomplish it successfully, researchers need to develop a criterion to organize and classify the notes, for example, on the basis of variables of the study, studies with similar findings… The last procedure in this phase requires researchers to summarize in brief the whole knowledge to give a global picture of the available studies in the field, and relate them to their own studies (Singh, 2006).

3.   Polishing; as a concluding phase, the literature review should be evaluated. In this vein, Mackey & Gass (2005 pp. 310-311) suggested a number of questions that can be used for such an evaluation:
- Are all relevant studies surveyed?
- Does the review provide an accurate and objective summary of the current state of the art and the theoretical framework of the study?
- Does the review present readers with enough background to understand how the study fits in with other research?

▪ (…) are any organizational changes or new inclusions to the literature review necessary to better contextualize the discussion of the results?

▪ Is the literature review relevant; that is, are studies that are peripheral to or irrelevant to the research question excluded?

Besides evaluating the content, the language used should be likewise reconsidered and reviewed. The latter can be done through self-evaluation, computer-assisted or peer-reviewing. It includes scrutinizing possible redundancy, sentence structure, verb tense, etc. in addition to verifying the inclusion of the used references and sources and citing them appropriately to avoid falling in plagiarism.

3. The Study
3.1. Description of the Survey

Data for the present study were collected through the use of a survey that was designed to investigate the websites and the applications with which master students and researchers are familiar, and to distinguish them from those they do not use. The survey is divided into three sections: section one addresses the participants' personal information, the second section investigates the participants' perceptions on computer use in research and academic writing. The last section presents a list of useful websites and applications that can be used in each step of writing the literature review; participants were required to select the ones they usually use among the list.
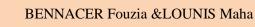
The survey was distributed to students and teachers through google forms via the link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScaOQMe1Ed360V7iPKHJbHWk-Wn8NliH6bFLIRPvOmVRcGNRw/viewform?usp=pp_url

A number of 100 researchers responded and their answers are analysed in the following section.

3.2. Analysis of the Survey

The participants were all familiar with doing research. 54% of them are teachers and 46 % are students. They either affiliate to a university or a research laboratory.

Asking the participants whether they use computers in research or not (Q1), the overwhelming majority responded positively (91%). The rest, however, responded negatively (09%). Querying about the extent to which computers help in facilitation research (Q2), all participants who responded positively agreed that they help to a great extent. Question three asks about the participants' reliance on applications and websites in writing literature reviews, 81% of the respondents reported that they use them whereas 19% reported the opposite. The last question
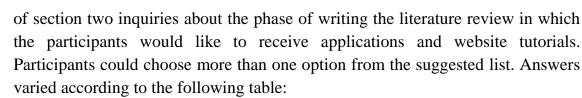
of section two inquiries about the phase of writing the literature review in which the participants would like to receive applications and website tutorials. Participants could choose more than one option from the suggested list. Answers varied according to the following table:

Table 1. Participants' need for tutorials on applications and websites

Phase of literature review	percentage
Referencing/ citation	76.2%
Gathering information	66.7%
Combining Resources/ Actual writing	66.7%
Checking grammar and plagiarism	66.7%
Writing bibliographies	42.9%

Accordingly, referencing and citation scored the highest percentage indicating that it is the phase where researchers face much difficulty. Gathering information, combining resources and writing in addition to checking grammar and plagiarism were equally chosen by 66.7% of the participants. This indicates that these phases are no less difficult than the former as they also require training and corresponding tutorials. Writing bibliographies was the least opted for option, yet, with a significant percentage itself (42.9%).

Hence, participants' answers showed that they face difficulties with all the steps of writing the literature review in approximate percentages although referencing and citation stand out at the top reflecting the participants' need for tutorials on computer applications and websites related to all steps of writing reviews of literature.

The last section of the survey shed light on some applications and websites and participants' familiarity with them. The respondents' answers are manifested in the following table:

Table 2. Participants' familiarity with some applications and websites

Phase of research	Applications/ websites	Percentage
Gathering data	Google Chrome	100%
	Mozila firefox	68.2%
	Internet explorer	59.1%
	Opera	59.1%
	Google Scholar	54.5%
	Academia.edu	59.1%
	Research Gate	50%
	JSTOR	22.7%
	Project MUSE	4.5%
Combining resources	Calibre	4.5%
	Adobe Acrobat Reader	68.2%
	Ref me	9.1%
	Cite this for me	27.3%
	Microsoft word reference	45.5%
	Mendeley	9.1%
Polishing	Microsoft word grammar correcting tools	50%
	Grammarly	36.4%
	Plagiarism checker X	45.5%

Thus, it can be claimed that the applications and websites that are common to researchers are: the browsers Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Internet explorer, Opera and websites Academia.edu, google scholar, and Adobe Acrobat Reader.

Participants reported less familiarity with Plagiarism checker X, Microsoft word grammar correcting tools, Microsoft word reference, Research Gate.

The least familiar applications and websites to the participants are: Project MUSE, JSTOR, Calibre, Ref me, Cite this for me, Mendeley, Grammarly.

3.3. Presenting the Least Common Applications and Websites

3.3.1. Project MUSE

It is an online non-profit database of peer-reviewed academic journals and electronic books for humanities and social sciences. For 25 years, Project MUSE has been a trusted and reliable source of complete, full-text versions from over 250 university presses and scholarly societies around the world. Currently,

Project MUSE has over 700 journals from 125 publishers and offers nearly 70,000 books from more than 140 presses. MUSE's online journal collections are available on a subscription basis to academic, public, special, and school libraries. It is a website which you can browse by authors, titles, journals…

To get access to Project Muse, connect to the website https://muse.jhu.edu/ , and subscribe.

3.3.2. JSTOR:

It is a digital library founded in 1995 in United States, it encompasses books and other primary sources as well as current issues of almost 2,000 journals in the humanities and social sciences. Most access is by subscription but some of the site is public, content is available free of charge.

To benefit from it, connect to www.jstor.org and subscribe to have an account and password. You can read online as you can download content.

3.3.3. Calibre

Calibre is a free downloadable application that serves as an e-book manager. It can be used easily to browse books using covers, titles, tags, authors, publishers, etc. It can display, edit, create and convert e-books to dozens of file types with the ability of detecting the format that best suits the device on its own, besides giving readers or users the opportunity of editing or creating metadata in existing or new fields, for instance, adding comments about the book, changing the book's style, creating a table of contents or improving punctuation and margins. Moreover, Calibre can be used to store and organize available e-books into virtual libraries with the possibility of coordinating them a variety of e-readers.

The use of such an application is not complicated, just type 'Calibre' onto Google and click on the 'Download' hyperlink. Then, click on "download Calibre desktop". Next, follow the instructions and the application will eventually be installed. For more practical utility, Calibre can be taken on a USB to be used everywhere (https://calibre-ebook.com/about).

3.3.4. Cite This For Me (formerly Ref me)

Besides giving credibility to the information mentioned in the literature review, crediting the originator of the information, and helping others follow up in case they need further detailed information, formal citation of sources provides evidence of research progress and helps researchers-mainly novices- avoid plagiarism as well. For citing in an easy and appropriate manner, researchers may help themselves with Cite This For Me. The latter is a Google Extension found in the Chrome Store that helps researchers with all types of citation be they citing a website, book, video, online image, or something totally different. It automatically creates website citations in the APA, MLA, Chicago, or Harvard referencing styles.

To use it, type Cite This For Me on google, then click on the "add extension" hyperlink which sits in the task bar. When researchers find a website they want to use for research, they simply click on Cite This For Me, and it creates a citation in the format they select be it APA, MLA, Harvard or Chicago format, then all what they have to do is copying it on the reference list (https://www.citethisforme.com/fr).

3.3.5. Mendeley

Mendeley Reference Manager is a free web and desktop reference management application. Instead of wasting time to write the reference list, Mendeley helps researchers simplify their reference management workflow. When clicking on the create refence option, Mendeley gives alternatives to choose the citation style, then it will automatically connect to the net to creates the citation, as it can add some important information (author name, year, volume, issue….). Furthermore, Mendeley can save the used citations, to insert them later on in the bibliography.

There are two ways to insert citations with Mendeley, either through working within Word document or initiating a Mendeley library. In other words, Mendeley Reference Manager allows the user to store, organize and search all references from just one library. Henceforth, the researchers can read, highlight and annotate PDFs, and keep all thoughts across multiple documents in one place besides collaborating with others through sharing references and ideas.

To benefit from the services that this application provides, the user has to type "Mendeley" onto google and click on the "download" hyperlink. Then, click

on "download Mendeley desktop". After following the instructions, the application will be eventually installed.

3.3.6. Grammarly

Grammarly is an easily used grammar checker and proofreading tool, it does not only check spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure, however, it offers real-time assistance to improve content's clarity, cohesiveness, fluency, as well as vocabulary. Once downloaded, it automatically analyzes writing and flags the words, phrases, or sentences that need correction or improvement; incorrect words or phrases are underlined with the red while those which need improvements are underlined with the yellow. In this vein, it proposes suggestions for better word choice, sentence construction, etc. Thus, users can refine the content's quality and improve their writing skills simultaneously.

Moreover, Grammarly imbeds a Plagiarism Checker, Human Proofreader and a Handbook. The first compares content through academic databases and more than 16 million web pages to make sure that what has been written is original. For further work polishing, the second tool affords human intervention through which Grammarly's professional proofreaders can check the work. Last, Grammarly's handbook manifests the basics of sentence constructions helping its users deal with more complex elements and mechanics of composition as it can be used as a reference (https://financesonline.com/how-does-grammarly-work-a-comprehensive-guide/).

3.3.7. Plagiarism checker X

Plagiarism Checker X helps researchers check duplication issues in their papers. They can easily check for content similarity, find the original sources and correct citations. To use such an application, first researchers have to download the application for free and install it on the desktop. Then, upload the file in the library and test the similarity index against the other texts available online. After few seconds, the final results come out with highlighted plagiarized contents. Along with the duplicated content, the users can view the sources which have similar parts and texts. Consequently, the researchers may remedy their writings and come up with a new non-plagiarized paper.

Conclusion

This paper manifested few applications and websites linked to each step of writing the literature review, so that researchers can move through their dissertation writing fast and spend less efforts, yet with satisfying results. However, the list of applications and websites provided hereby is not an exclusive one, rather others can be very helpful since technology is continuously and rapidly expanding.

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