STEPS INVOLVED IN CREATING A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a structured, comprehensive, and methodical approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant research on a specific topic.

Here are the general steps involved in conducting an SLR:

1. Define Your Research Question or Questions

- Clearly articulate the research questions or hypotheses that guide the review. These should be specific, focused, and answerable.

Example: *What is the impact of X on Y in Z?*

2. Develop a Protocol

- *Protocol:* A plan that outlines the methods and criteria for the review process, including search strategies, inclusion/exclusion criteria, data extraction methods, and analysis approaches.

- This helps ensure transparency and consistency throughout the review process.

N.B. Further information on the development of a Protocol can be accessed here.

3. Literature Search

- Identify and select appropriate databases (e.g., *ScienceDirect*, *Taylor & Francis*, *Ebsco*) and search terms to locate relevant studies.

- Use well-defined search strategies to ensure all relevant studies are captured.

- This step may involve selecting studies based on keywords, titles, abstracts, and publications from a specific period.

N.B. Further information on the Literature Search process can be accessed here

4. Screening of Studies

- Title and Abstract Screening: Review the titles and abstracts of the retrieved studies against your inclusion/exclusion criteria to filter out irrelevant studies.

- Full-Text Screening: For studies passing the title and abstract screening, read the full text to assess if they meet all inclusion criteria.

5. **Data Extraction**

- Extract relevant data from the studies, including study characteristics (e.g., author, year of publication), methodology, sample size, findings, and outcomes.
- Use standardized forms or software (e.g., *Excel, Rayyan*) to maintain consistency and prevent errors.

N.B Additional information on Article Screening & Citation Management can be found here.

6. **Quality Assessment**

- Evaluate the quality of the included studies, using appropriate tools or checklists (e.g. *CASP*, *Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool*).
- This helps assess the validity and reliability of the studies, and their potential impact on the review's conclusions.

7. **Data Synthesis**

- Combine and synthesize the findings from the studies. There are two main approaches:
- *Qualitative Synthesis:* Summarizing the key findings and themes without numerical analysis.
- *Quantitative Synthesis* (Meta-Analysis): Statistically combining the results of similar studies to obtain an overall effect size or summary measure.
- Address any heterogeneity (variability) across studies.

8. **Interpretation of Findings**

- Analyse the results, discussing the implications of the findings, the strengths and weaknesses of the reviewed studies, and potential biases.
- Reflect on gaps in the literature and areas for future research.

9. **Report Writing**

Write the systematic review report, following a clear structure:

- **Introduction:** Explains the research questions, objectives, and importance of the review.

- **Methods:** Details the protocol, search strategy, inclusion/exclusion criteria, data extraction process, and quality assessment.
- **Results:** Presents findings, including data synthesis, tables, and figures.
- **Discussion:** Discusses the findings, limitations, and conclusions.
- **Conclusion:** Summarizes key insights and potential directions for future research.

10. **Notes to consider for an MA Student conducting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR)**

- Generally, It is not necessary for an MA student to publish their systematic literature review (SLR) to complete their degree, as publishing is generally a voluntary, albeit highly beneficial, endeavour rather than a requirement for graduation.
- The primary purpose of an MA dissertation is to demonstrate research skills, not necessarily to contribute to scientific literature.
- A full, publication-quality Systematic Review is highly rigorous, often taking 18 months or more, and typically requires a team of 2–3 subject experts to reduce bias, which may be beyond the scope of the standard MA timeframe.
- Students should discuss with their Research Supervisor as whether their systematic literature review should be submitted for publication.

Conclusion

Following the steps outlined above ensures that your literature review is **systematic, rigorous**, and **reproducible**, leading to reliable and transparent conclusions.