

THE FUTURE OF LITERATURE REVIEWS: ENHANCING LITERATURE REVIEWS WITH MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the limitations of traditional literature reviews in facilitating knowledge synthesis across disciplines, explores the integration of diverse academic perspectives, and investigates how literature review methodologies can be refined to better support multidisciplinary research. Conceptual in nature, this research systematically accumulates and synthesizes existing scholarship to substantiate the rationale for incorporating broader analytical frameworks into literature reviews. The findings hold significant implications for scholars, emphasizing the urgent need for methodological advancements that foster more integrative and comprehensive review practices. As research challenges grow increasingly complex, rethinking literature review methodologies becomes essential to ensuring that academic inquiry remains dynamic and responsive. By systematically incorporating insights from multiple disciplines, scholars can broaden theoretical horizons, cultivate innovative research agendas, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge that is both academically rigorous and practically relevant in addressing real-world issues.

Keywords: Multidisciplinary, Literature Review, Methodologies, Systematic Literature Review.

INTRODUCTION

Literature reviews serve as a cornerstone of academic inquiry (Paul and Criado, 2020), playing a pivotal role in synthesizing existing research (Mukherjee and Saritha, 2024), identifying knowledge gaps, and establishing a foundation for future scholarly exploration. They function as essential instruments through which researchers critically assess the current state of knowledge within a field (Paul and Criado, 2020), develop theoretical frameworks, and refine research trajectories. However, conventional literature reviews have predominantly remained confined within rigid disciplinary boundaries, resulting in fragmented knowledge that lacks broader applicability. This intellectual compartmentalization restricts opportunities for multidisciplinary engagement, ultimately preventing scholars from harnessing insights from other fields that could significantly enrich their research. Moreover, as global challenges become increasingly complex and multifaceted (Mashau, 2023), the need for multidisciplinary research has become more pronounced (Sanders and Wagner, 2011), offering a pathway toward more comprehensive and holistic solutions. To overcome the inherent limitations of traditional literature reviews, this study seeks to explore how literature review methodologies can be reimaged to integrate multidisciplinary perspectives. By examining the structural and methodological barriers to multidisciplinary literature synthesis, this research aims to contribute to the growing discourse on evolving literature review frameworks. By fostering a more interconnected and integrative academic landscape, this study underscores the importance of rethinking literature reviews as a dynamic and inclusive process that transcends traditional disciplinary silos.

Historically, literature reviews have been conducted within clearly delineated academic fields, each with its own distinct research paradigms, theoretical constructs, and methodological traditions. Disciplines such as psychology, sociology, engineering, business, and medicine have developed in relative isolation, resulting in literature reviews that engage primarily with research produced within their respective fields. This compartmentalization reinforces disciplinary boundaries, limiting the extent to which scholars can incorporate diverse intellectual perspectives. For instance, a literature review in political science may focus exclusively on governance theories while neglecting psychological perspectives on leadership and decision-making, despite their potential relevance. Similarly, an engineering review on artificial intelligence might overlook ethical considerations from philosophy, which could provide crucial insights into the broader societal implications of AI.

The necessity of multidisciplinary research has become increasingly apparent in addressing complex global issues (Shahid, 2024) such as climate change, public health crises, and technological advancements. These challenges defy the constraints of any single academic discipline, necessitating insights from multiple fields. For example, climate change is not merely an environmental problem (Urry, 2015); it is deeply intertwined with economics, political science, sociology, and engineering. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical need for integrating medical research with behavioral sciences, data analytics, and public policy to develop effective responses. These examples highlight the urgent demand for multidisciplinary collaboration and prompt an essential question: How can literature review methodologies be restructured to better reflect the evolving interdisciplinary nature of academic research?

Despite the increasing recognition of multidisciplinary research (Arnold et al., 2021), literature reviews remain entrenched in traditional disciplinary frameworks. This restriction inhibits scholars from synthesizing knowledge across diverse fields, thereby limiting both innovation and comprehensive problem-solving. A fundamental challenge is that existing literature review methodologies are not explicitly designed to facilitate multidisciplinary engagement, making it difficult for researchers to establish connections beyond their primary area of study.

Although structured methodologies exist for literature reviews- particularly systematic reviews- these frameworks often reinforce disciplinary divisions rather than facilitate multidisciplinary synthesis. Systematic approaches such as the TCCM model (Theory, Context, Characteristics, and Methodology) (Rosado-Serrano, Paul and Dikova, 2018) and the ADO framework (Antecedents, Decisions, and Outcomes) (Paul and Benito, 2018) provide clear guidelines for evaluating and emphasize methodological rigor, synthesizing research within a specific field but do not inherently support the integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines. The absence of explicit mechanisms for multidisciplinary synthesis within these frameworks highlights a critical gap in literature review methodologies. To fully harness the potential of multidisciplinary research, these limitations must be systematically addressed.

This research holds significant value for scholars by offering new perspectives on how literature reviews can be refined to promote greater multidisciplinary collaboration. It challenges the traditional approach to literature reviews by introducing a more integrative model that encourages scholars to incorporate diverse perspectives in their work. By shifting toward a multidisciplinary approach, researchers can develop more innovative research agendas that address complex, real-world issues with greater depth and nuance. Furthermore, this study provides valuable insights for journal editors and peer reviewers, encouraging them to reconsider evaluation criteria for literature reviews and to foster multidisciplinary engagement in academic publishing. Given the increasing recognition of multidisciplinary research in high-impact journals (Paul and Benito, 2018), revising literature review

methodologies is essential for advancing a more integrative academic discourse. Ultimately, the restructuring of literature review methodologies to incorporate multidisciplinary perspectives has the potential to enhance the quality, impact, and relevance of academic research. By breaking down disciplinary barriers and fostering intellectual cross-pollination, scholars can contribute to a more interconnected and dynamic academic ecosystem.

TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO LITERATURE REVIEWS

Traditional literature review approaches have been instrumental in synthesizing vast bodies of work within specific disciplines, facilitating the development of specialized knowledge (Kaushik and Mukherjee, 2021). However, these conventional methodologies have largely been designed to operate within disciplinary boundaries, often reinforcing rather than challenging the separation between academic fields.

Three primary types of literature reviews—narrative, systematic, and scoping reviews—have historically guided the way researchers compile and assess existing studies. Each of these methodologies possesses distinct strengths and limitations, influencing the way knowledge is structured and interpreted within a given discipline. Despite their methodological rigor and established credibility, these approaches tend to emphasize depth within a specific field rather than breadth across multiple disciplines, thereby limiting opportunities for multi-disciplinary knowledge integration. Furthermore, disciplinary constraints inherent in these review methodologies often result in insular academic discourse, restricting the ability of researchers to explore connections between seemingly disparate fields.

This section critically examines the strengths and limitations of narrative, systematic, and scoping reviews, followed by an exploration of the disciplinary constraints that shape conventional literature reviews. Additionally, it presents case studies of domain-specific literature reviews, illustrating how disciplinary boundaries influence the scope, findings, and overall impact of literature synthesis.

Narrative Reviews

Narrative reviews, also known as traditional reviews (Sukhera, 2022), provide a qualitative synthesis of existing literature by summarizing key findings, theories, and trends within a given discipline. These reviews are particularly valuable for offering a broad overview of a research topic, contextualizing studies within historical and theoretical frameworks, and identifying overarching themes. Scholars conducting narrative reviews exercise considerable interpretive freedom, allowing for a flexible, discursive examination of literature that can generate novel insights and theoretical advancements (Baumeister and Leary, 1997).

Unlike systematic reviews, authors of narrative reviews do not always explicitly outline the methodology used to identify and select articles for review (Ferrari, 2015). This lack of transparency can stem from the exploratory nature of narrative reviews, where the objective is to provide a broad, thematic synthesis of existing literature rather than a rigid, criteria-driven assessment. Instead of following a strict protocol for study selection, authors often rely on their expertise and familiarity with the field to identify relevant literature, drawing on both seminal works and emerging scholarship to construct a coherent narrative. While this approach enables a more flexible and intuitive synthesis of knowledge, it also introduces the risk of selection bias, as the scope and comprehensiveness of the review depend on the author's judgment and awareness of relevant studies.

However, despite criticisms of methodological subjectivity, the flexibility and advantages of narrative reviews contribute significantly to topic development. Because these

reviews allow for a broader, more interpretive approach, they are particularly useful for conceptual development, and identifying trends across diverse studies. The ability to integrate research findings without the constraints of rigid inclusion criteria enables scholars to draw connections between disparate ideas, explore theoretical implications, and highlight emerging areas of inquiry. Furthermore, in fields where research is still in its formative stages, narrative reviews serve as essential groundwork for shaping future systematic investigations, offering a conceptual foundation upon which more structured reviews can be built.

Systematic Reviews

Systematic reviews are widely regarded as the most rigorous and reliable method for synthesizing research findings (Lame, 2019), particularly in fields such as medicine, psychology, and education. Unlike narrative reviews, systematic reviews follow a highly structured and transparent methodology, employing predefined research questions, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and rigorous data extraction techniques to minimize bias and enhance reproducibility. These reviews are fundamental to evidence-based practice, providing a comprehensive and methodologically sound synthesis of existing literature.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria refer to the predefined conditions that determine which studies are included in the review and which are excluded. These criteria are established to ensure that only relevant, high-quality studies are considered, thereby improving the reliability and validity of the findings (Xiao and Watson, 2017). For instance, a systematic review examining the effects of a particular drug on cardiovascular health might include randomized controlled trials published in peer-reviewed journals within the last decade while excluding case studies, editorials, or research with small sample sizes.

Data extraction techniques involve systematically collecting and organizing key information from the selected studies to facilitate comparative analysis. This process typically includes extracting details such as study objectives, sample sizes, methodologies, outcome measures, and key findings. By structuring this information in a standardized manner, researchers can conduct meta-analyses or thematic syntheses to draw reliable conclusions from the aggregated data.

Despite their methodological rigor, systematic reviews present several limitations. First, they are highly time-intensive and resource-demanding, often requiring months or even years to complete due to the extensive literature search, screening, and data analysis processes. Additionally, the rigid structure of systematic reviews may limit exploratory and interpretive flexibility, making them less suitable for emerging or rapidly evolving fields where research is still fragmented. Another major limitation is the narrow focus on quantitative studies that meet strict methodological criteria, often leading to the exclusion of valuable qualitative research that could provide deeper contextual insights. Furthermore, because systematic reviews are designed to assess literature within a clearly defined research domain, they tend to remain confined to a single discipline, limiting opportunities for multidisciplinary knowledge integration.

Scoping Reviews

A scoping review is particularly valuable when a research topic has not been extensively explored or is characterized by complexity and heterogeneity (Mays et al., 2001). This approach is commonly employed to assess the breadth, scope, and nature of research activity within a particular domain; evaluate the feasibility and potential cost of conducting a full systematic review; synthesize and disseminate existing findings; and identify gaps in the current body of literature (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). By offering a structured and transparent methodology for mapping research areas, scoping reviews can serve as

independent studies or as preliminary steps to systematic reviews (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005).

Scoping reviews are particularly suited for exploratory research, as they facilitate a comprehensive examination of existing literature while identifying research gaps and refining conceptual frameworks. Unlike systematic reviews, scoping reviews do not typically assess the methodological quality of included studies; rather, they emphasize broad literature synthesis, providing an extensive overview of available evidence rather than a critical appraisal of study validity.

A key strength of scoping reviews lies in their inclusive approach to literature synthesis, making them highly effective for multidisciplinary research. They allow for the integration of both quantitative and qualitative studies, accommodating diverse research methodologies. However, this inclusivity often comes at the cost of methodological rigor, as scoping reviews do not involve a systematic evaluation of study quality or reliability. Additionally, although they have the potential to incorporate perspectives from multiple disciplines, they are still often conducted within a single academic domain, which can limit their ability to foster comprehensive interdisciplinary knowledge synthesis.

Comparative Insights

While each of these literature review methodologies serves a distinct purpose, they share a common limitation: their primary focus on disciplinary knowledge accumulation rather than interdisciplinary knowledge integration. Narrative reviews provide flexibility but lack methodological rigor, systematic reviews offer methodological precision but are often rigid and exclusionary, and scoping reviews allow for broad exploration but lack depth in assessing study quality. The challenge, therefore, is to develop literature review methodologies that retain the strengths of these approaches while facilitating greater engagement with multi-disciplinary insights.

Disciplinary Constraints in Traditional Literature Reviews

Traditional literature reviews are deeply embedded within disciplinary structures, reinforcing established academic silos that limit intellectual exchange between fields. These constraints manifest in several ways:

Theoretical Insularity – Many literature reviews are grounded in field-specific theoretical frameworks, making it difficult to integrate alternative perspectives that could challenge or refine dominant paradigms.

Methodological Rigidity – Established review methodologies prioritize certain research designs over others, often favoring quantitative over qualitative studies. This bias affects disciplines differently; for instance, biomedical systematic reviews may exclude ethnographic studies that explore patient experiences, despite their potential relevance to healthcare policy.

Citation Networks and Academic Gatekeeping – Scholars tend to cite within their discipline, reinforcing intellectual echo chambers that privilege field-specific perspectives while marginalizing external insights. Journals and funding agencies also play a role in maintaining disciplinary boundaries by prioritizing research that aligns with established disciplinary norms.

Institutional and Professional Incentives – Many academic institutions encourage specialization within a field, as career advancement is often tied to contributions within a

specific discipline rather than interdisciplinary impact. This professionalization of knowledge further discourages researchers from engaging in cross-disciplinary literature synthesis.

The cumulative effect of these constraints is a literature review process that prioritizes depth within a field at the expense of breadth across disciplines, ultimately limiting the potential for innovative, integrative research.

DOMAIN-SPECIFIC LITERATURE REVIEWS

Artificial Intelligence and Ethics

In engineering and computer science, literature reviews on artificial intelligence (AI) frequently focus on technical advancements, such as machine learning algorithms and data processing techniques, while overlooking ethical and philosophical discussions on AI's societal impact. A more integrative review approach that incorporates insights from philosophy, law, and political science could provide a more comprehensive understanding of AI's implications.

Climate Change Research

Environmental science literature reviews tend to focus on ecological data and climate modeling, often neglecting research in economics and political science that examines policy interventions and economic incentives for climate action. Bridging this gap could lead to more effective interdisciplinary climate strategies.

These case studies illustrate how traditional literature review methodologies often exclude valuable interdisciplinary insights, reinforcing the need for a more inclusive and integrative approach to literature synthesis. By critically examining the strengths and limitations of conventional review methodologies, this section highlights the imperative to develop more adaptive frameworks that foster knowledge integration across disciplines.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

Multidisciplinary research has emerged as a critical approach in contemporary academic inquiry, allowing scholars to integrate diverse disciplinary perspectives to tackle complex problems that cannot be adequately addressed within the confines of a single field. In an increasingly interconnected world, challenges such as climate change, public health crises, technological advancements, and ethical dilemmas require knowledge synthesis from multiple domains to develop holistic and effective solutions. Traditional disciplinary silos often limit the scope of research by focusing narrowly on field-specific theories and methodologies, whereas a multidisciplinary approach fosters innovation by drawing on insights from various disciplines. By bridging disciplinary boundaries, multidisciplinary research enables scholars to develop more comprehensive frameworks (Clark and Wallace, 2015), generate novel hypotheses, and create impactful knowledge that transcends academic specializations.

While multidisciplinary research is widely recognized for its potential, integrating insights from multiple fields requires structured methodologies and well-defined frameworks. In literature reviews, for example, the challenge lies in systematically synthesizing research across disciplines while maintaining coherence and methodological rigor. To address this challenge, researchers have to propose innovative frameworks that incorporate multidisciplinary perspectives, ensuring that knowledge from diverse fields is not only considered but also effectively integrated to generate deeper insights.

The Role of Knowledge Integration in Solving Complex Problems

Knowledge integration is a fundamental aspect of multidisciplinary research, as it facilitates the synthesis of diverse theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches to address multifaceted issues. The ability to incorporate insights from multiple disciplines fosters a more nuanced and holistic understanding of complex problems, ultimately leading to more effective solutions.

For example, in management studies, decision-making processes and leadership theories have traditionally been analyzed through the lens of organizational behavior and business strategy. However, the integration of cognitive neuroscience and psychology into management research has provided deeper insights into how emotions, cognitive biases, and neurological mechanisms influence leadership effectiveness and employee motivation. For instance, the study of neuroleadership has contributed to the understanding of how brain functions impact problem-solving, decision-making, and conflict resolution in corporate settings. By integrating knowledge from neuroscience, management scholars can refine leadership development programs and create more effective organizational strategies.

In the social sciences, poverty and inequality have traditionally been studied through economic theories and policy analysis. However, incorporating insights from sociology, anthropology, and psychology has significantly enriched the understanding of poverty as a multidimensional issue. For example, behavioral economics has demonstrated how cognitive biases and social norms influence financial decision-making among low-income populations. Additionally, cultural anthropology provides a deeper understanding of how historical and societal contexts shape economic behaviors. By synthesizing knowledge from multiple social science disciplines, policymakers can design more effective and culturally sensitive interventions to alleviate poverty.

These examples illustrate how multidisciplinary research enhances problem-solving by integrating diverse fields of study, offering broader, more inclusive perspectives that traditional, discipline-specific approaches may overlook.

Definitions and Types

Multidisciplinary research refers to an approach where scholars from different disciplines collaborate to address a common research problem while maintaining their distinct disciplinary perspectives. There are several types of multidisciplinary research, each with varying degrees of integration between disciplines:

1. **Additive Multidisciplinary Research** – In this approach, contributions from different disciplines are compiled without necessarily synthesizing their findings into a unified framework. Each discipline retains its methodologies and interpretations, leading to multiple perspectives on a given issue. This type is common in edited volumes and comparative studies.
2. **Integrative Multidisciplinary Research** – Here, disciplines interact more closely, integrating findings to develop a cohesive analytical framework. Researchers collaboratively analyze the same phenomenon from multiple disciplinary lenses, ensuring a more nuanced understanding of the research topic.
3. **Hierarchical Multidisciplinary Research** – This approach prioritizes one discipline as the primary analytical framework, while insights from other disciplines are used to complement and refine the central perspective. It is common in applied research fields where a dominant discipline (e.g., medicine, economics) serves as the foundation, and other disciplines contribute supplementary insights.
4. **Interactive Multidisciplinary Research** – This approach fosters continuous interaction between disciplines throughout the research process, including the formulation of research questions, data collection, and interpretation. This model is particularly valuable for dynamic and evolving fields such as artificial intelligence ethics, climate adaptation strategies, and public health policies.

Each of these types presents unique advantages and challenges, requiring carefully designed methodologies to ensure the effective integration of diverse disciplinary insights.

Example of Successful Multi-Disciplinary Collaborations

Researchers can modify traditional systematic review methodologies to include explicit sections for multi-disciplinary integration. Expanding databases beyond discipline-specific repositories can ensure a broader and more diverse pool of literature sources.

One such application of multidisciplinary research can be found in the study by Mukherjee and S.R. (2024), titled "*Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda*," published in the *International Journal of Ethics and Systems*. In this paper, the authors propose an advanced framework for incorporating multidisciplinary perspectives within systematic literature reviews. The framework introduced by Mukherjee and S.R. (2024) is instrumental in driving future research in the different ways. This model ensures that literature reviews serve as a platform for knowledge expansion rather than just knowledge consolidation. Future researchers can adopt this framework to expand the scope of systematic reviews, making them more inclusive of diverse academic perspectives. The structured inclusion of multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives within literature reviews fosters a more holistic research approach. This ensures that knowledge synthesis is not confined to discipline-specific insights but rather integrates findings from complementary fields, leading to more innovative and impactful research outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The evolving landscape of academic research demands a departure from traditional, discipline-specific methodologies toward more integrative and expansive approaches. This paper has critically examined how literature reviews, as foundational elements of scholarly inquiry, can be transformed by incorporating multidisciplinary perspectives. The study has underscored the limitations of conventional literature review methodologies, which often reinforce disciplinary silos and restrict knowledge synthesis. It has also highlighted how multidisciplinary research can enhance theoretical development, enrich methodological diversity, and generate holistic solutions to complex global challenges.

A key insight from this research is that multidisciplinary literature reviews are essential for fostering innovation and addressing real-world problems. By integrating insights from multiple disciplines, researchers can identify new theoretical linkages, bridge knowledge gaps, and propose more comprehensive frameworks. The study by Mukherjee and S.R. 2024 has demonstrated how structured approaches can facilitate the systematic incorporation of multidisciplinary perspectives into literature reviews, ensuring that research inquiries extend beyond a single domain. This structured approach provides a blueprint for future studies, allowing scholars to systematically identify, categorize, and synthesize knowledge across disciplines. The academic publishing system, which often prioritizes research within established disciplines, must also evolve to encourage and support multidisciplinary research efforts.

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