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Review Articles: A Critical Review of the Pitfalls and Guidelines to effectively conducting and reporting reviews

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Abstract. One of the most fundamental building blocks of any research activity is available knowledge in the subject or area being investigated. Therefore, how to appropriately access, assess, decipher, analyse and synthesise information from this body of knowledge should be an important consideration for researchers. A properly structured, conducted and well reported literature review can build a powerful foundation for strengthening knowledge and advancing theoretical or conceptual framework development. The integration of research outcomes and perspectives from diverse studies can help pinpoint consistencies and inconsistencies, research gaps and address research questions in a cogent manner. Despite reviews being a necessity, how to do them effectively, transparently and constructively remains a complicated task. In light of this observation, literature review as a research methodology dimension is vital, yet researchers often find their review articles being rejected for publication. The study found out that common pitfalls that lead to rejections include: poor article quality, no visible methodology and unclear contribution or lack of value addition. Possibly, researchers are not offering, adequate information on the research strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies used, the research process and analysis. This study was motivated by this rejection dilemma and sought to contribute to research literature on how to enhance the quality, validity and trustworthiness of review research. Through a critical literature review, the paper discusses the probable contribution of review articles, challenges of conducting them productively and possible amelioration guidelines.

Keywords. Literature Review, Knowledge, Contribution, Narrative Review, Scoping Review

1. Introduction

Literature review is considered an irrefutably essential component of research especially in advancing knowledge in the chosen subject area, using the current body of literature as a foundation. Despite this being a vital career contribution, review articles are infrequent and uncommon among individual researchers (Baumeister & Leary, 1997), due to the difficulties in conducting them successfully (Wee & Banister, 2016). Reviewing literature can also provide an insight into the depth and breadth of the current body of knowledge thus establishing a knowledge frontier (Xiao & Watson, 2019) or a critical, evaluative and interpretative map (Hart, 2018). Reviews can further give researchers a platform to gather and summarise previous research, outline recent advances, evaluate and synthesise various connected studies in an area. This could allow one to identify strengths and weaknesses, consistencies and inconsistencies as well as outright contradictions in the available literature (Paré, Trudel, Jaana, & Kitsiou, 2015).

Literature reviews in research can come under two forms: (1) as part of an empirical study in order to provide a contextual background and to reveal gaps that the current study seeks to close, thus providing a justification for the study. The gaps could either be perhaps literature, policy, theoretical, conceptual or methodological (2) a review article where literature review is used as the main "stand-alone" or sole methodology in the study, thus no empirical research is undertaken (Reviews) (Okoli & Schabram, 2010; Snyder, 2019; Templier & Paré, 2015; Xiao & Watson, 2019). This research focuses on the second type of literature review whose outcome is a review paper or article. Reviews are recognised as vital in the research arena for the reasons summarised above and many more. Despite the importance of literature reviews in providing an introduction and stimulating ideas for new areas to explore, they are not easy to undertake. They are complex, laborious, pain-staking and time consuming (Chen, Wang, & Lee, 2016; Coughlan & Cronin, 2016).

The diversity and complexity of research outcomes, knowledge generated and conclusions drawn due to variations in research objectives, paradigm, ontological, epistemological and methodological orientations adopted, make reviews more intricate (Chen et al., 2016). How to build a coherent story from previous studies by other scholars, focusing on a particular research question or problem is a difficult process. Furthermore, how to construct a plausible overview or create a state of the art knowledge snapshot through literature review, analysis and synthesis is not an easy journey. Several review papers are often rejected by journals for one reason or the other. The prominent statements were: "the review is not critical enough", "it seems the author just brought about a compilation of studies without a systematic approach", "the author's voice is missing in the article", "the contribution or value addition is not clear" and "there is lack of clarity of the research problem or the research question" among others (Wee & Banister, 2016). In some cases, reviewers raised concerns of relatively weak discussions and poor conclusions or at times questions such as, how did you choose what resources to use and why? Some of the frequently asked questions include, "what is the expected contribution to knowledge?" or "what will be the value added?" (Knopf, 2006). Hart (2018:1) cautions that reviews should not be just "thinly annotated bibliographies", but an evaluative, clear, coherent and interpretative summary of what has been researched on the area, how the studies were undertaken and what key issues remain to be addressed. In light of the above concerns and trying to reconcile them with submissions by review researchers such as Xiao and Watson (2019), who express that reviews "should be valid, reliable and repeatable" and Hart (2018:1) who emphasises that reviews must be of good quality and that "quality means appropriate breadth and depth, rigor and consistency, clarity and brevity and effective analysis and synthesis". How do we then reconcile the reviewer expectations on perhaps quality, review protocol and research contribution and the pitfalls faced by researchers that often lead to manuscript rejections? Are researchers aware of these challenges and are there any clear guidelines on how to address them?

Studies focusing on the methodology for review articles are minimal and scarce in some disciplines (Xiao & Watson, 2019) or sporadic (Chen et al., 2016) or at times they fail to give adequate guidelines on how to conduct comprehensive reviews as in some cases the methodology section in review articles is totally forgotten, ignored or insufficiently articulated (Wee & Banister, 2016). In other cases, there seems to be confusion and lack of congruence in the researchers' methodology outline where one points to a type of review as the one adopted, but the researcher goes on to articulate features for a completely different type altogether (no fit in the type proposed and the actual research process) (Coughlan & Cronin, 2016). The challenge is also further evident where reviewers question issues of lack of deep or adequate critical analysis or lack of systematic protocol in all reviews (even in scoping, narrative and

descriptive reviews), suggesting a one size fit all kind of expectation, despite the fact that these reviews vary and accordingly how they are carried out, the outcomes and expectations should differ. For example, a systematic review is more precise and adopt a more standardised, strict and protocol driven process (Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Cronin, Ryan, & Coughlan, 2008), yet a narrative review is unsystematic and less precise (Grant & Booth, 2009). Evaluation of the latter against the criteria for assessing the former would result in a manuscript being considered lacking or fundamentally flawed and even rejected. Wee and Banister (2016) allude to a rise in the rejected proportions of review articles submitted to key academic journals, estimating rejection levels of between 50% and 90% of submitted review articles in transport journals. The high rejection rates are also affirmed by several researchers who approximate the rates at around 80% -95% (Bjock, 2019, Khadikar, 2018; Kumar and Rao (2018). This paper is therefore motivated by the growing number of rejections in review papers and centres on outlining the common and seemingly hidden pitfalls as well as challenges faced by researchers in conducting effective reviews. Through a critical review of literature, this study sought to suggest possible guidelines towards addressing the noted pitfalls in conducting cogent reviews, especially on how to enrich the quality, rigor, validity, reliability, dependability and reproducibility of reviews.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopted a critical review approach, commonly described as an integrative review. Petticrew and Roberts (2008:19) describe a critical review as a "critical evaluation of the literature according to argument or logic and/ or epistemological tradition of the review subject, and Carliner (2011) explain it as a detailed review method that permits the literature reviewer to review, critique, evaluate critically and synthesise literature that is representative of the area under review. The results lead to new conceptualisations or new approaches and standpoints on the research problem. Souza et al. (2010) submit that integrative reviews help determine the current knowledge about the topic under study and through synthesis and analysis of multiple studies, thus making a worthwhile contribution to a critical assessment of the problem (in this case pitfalls to coming up with effective and publishable review articles) as well as to the development of protocols, guidelines and procedures (in this case guidelines to ameliorate the impact of the identified challenges to conducting effective reviews that result in publishable articles. These type of reviews are semi-systematic in nature. The study targeted studies focusing on the guidelines or methodology of conducting literature reviews, review studies or using literature review as a methodology as well as those on challenges to effectively conducting reviews or writing review articles. The focus was on studies published in English language. Endnote was used for bibliographical management, storing articles and referencing during the writing process.

Literature Search and selection. In order to identify the relevant studies the first step was to search through the Google Scholar database for such studies as highlighted above. The Google scholar data base was chosen based on recommendation from various literature review scholars who recommend it on the basis of being extensive, comprehensive and open access (Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Jalali & Wohlin, 2012; Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019). Xiao and Watson (2019:103) specifically describe the database as "a very powerful open access database that archives journal articles as well as 'grey literature' such as conference proceedings, thesis and reports. Bandara et al. (2011) affirm the importance of the Google Scholar database arguing that it "is now considered sufficiently robust". The researchers are quick to highlight that, despite the database providing researchers with a platform to broadly search for scholarly knowledge and studies across multiple sources and disciplines, it is

criticised for lack of transparency on coverage and calculation of citation counts as well as resulting in large amounts of studies being identified. It was important to narrow the sample accordingly and focus it to maintain sufficient breadth and depth and give rationalisation of the scope selected. The research question and the objectives of the study were key in framing the selection criteria for this study. The search words that were used for the initial scoping search for literature included: "Literature review as a research methodology", "How to conduct review research", "How to conduct literature review" and "Challenges and guidelines to conducting reviews". After the initial search the search terms were further modified to include: "Challenges in conducting effective reviews", "Common pitfalls in conducting or writing review articles", "pitfalls in conducting reviews as stand-alone method", "rejection of review articles by journals" and "possible reasons for rejection of review articles by journals".

Inclusion and exclusion decisions. The focus was on original peer-reviewed papers as well as conference proceedings. The researcher read through all the titles, keywords abstracts, and introductions for the studies outputs generated from the database search. The researcher decided to widen the consideration of studies to include the introduction due to the fact that some titles and abstracts may fail to give enough information on the study. As earlier highlighted in the introduction that there are two types of literature review, one for providing a background for an empirical research article and the other where literature review is used as a stand-alone method, it was important to focus on the latter when selecting papers for review as this is the focus of this study. So papers that described the former were excluded from the scope of this review. From the selected papers from the database backward and forward searches (Bandara et al., 2011; Levy & Ellis, 2006; Webster & Watson, 2002) (backward and forward snowballing respectively as described by Jalali and Wohlin (2012)) or citation or reference list mining (Padron, 2018) were conducted to identify other relevant articles. The backward search adopted in this case took two forms firstly the backward reference search and the previously used key words. With the former the researcher went through the selected articles' reference list and select studies whose tittles matched the focus of the current research and these were searched for in different databases and evaluated for relevance using the keywords, abstract and introduction (Levy & Ellis, 2006). For some of the papers the methodology section was checked in order to have an appreciation of the keywords that were used to search databases in order to yield the articles cited in the previous studies selected. Forward citation searching on the other hand entailed reviewing additional publications that have cited the articles identified in step one. For example, the forward reference search for Baumeister and Leary (1997) and Webster and Watson (2002) who are pioneer researchers on literature reviews as a stand-alone methodology were conducted to further expand the sample and knowledge gathering by identify newer publications and developments on reviews yielding articles such as Xiao and Watson (2019) and Levy and Ellis (2006) among others. The identified articles were assessed against the criteria of relevant tittle, abstract and introduction to assess for applicability and appropriateness to the study. The search, evaluation process is briefly summarised in the flow chart in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Flowchart depicting the literature review process
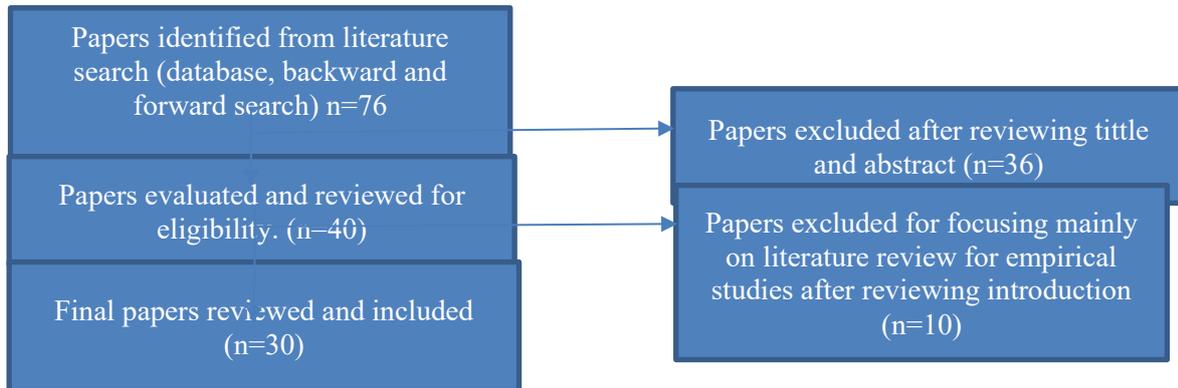
Source: Own Compilation with guidance from Kornhaber, Cross, Betihavas, and Bridgman (2016)

Extraction, analysis and synthesis of data. Through the use of the NVIVO qualitative data software, data from the selected papers (that had been stored in the Endnote citation database) was extracted, collated and thematically and critically evaluated. The analysis focused on the major themes that had been inductively obtained from the reviewed literature. The focus of the study was on two major aspects in relation to review articles: the major pitfalls or challenges faced by literature reviewers as well as guidelines to minimise the negative impact of the pitfalls on the acceptability of review articles. The major themes derived were guided by these focal points of the research. Extracts that were related from different papers were grouped together and a broad theme that covered the issues raised derived. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to establish frequently visible content and issues and accordingly group them together. Similar themes were collapsed in one major theme. For example, Stephen (2012) and Hesterman et al. (2018) summarised the reasons for review rejections as, the lack of contribution, poor intrinsic quality (unclear introduction, objectives, article structure, language, text coherence, weak methodology and data analysis explanations as well poor conceptualisation of discussion. Bjork (2019), grouped the reasons for article rejection to include: poor methodology, no new information, poor language and poor references. Kumar and Rao (2018) allude to weak research motives, poor analysis, poor presentation, lack of proper structure and lack of logical flow of points and the whole review report as the major justifications. Nakano and Muniz Jnr (2018) posit that 65% of rejected review articles lack conceptual and theoretical contribution and often have poor rhetoric (coherence and clarity). In affirmation, Bandara et al. (2015) adduce that rejections are often linked to deficiencies in articulating the scope, relevance as well as the how quality was maintained during the review. The researchers suggest that reviews are often rejected for lack of evidence on how insights were formed as well as the lack of perceived value addition. Through the use of the NVIVO software, the grouping of extracts from the above researchers and others papers on the challenges of writing effective reviews and reasons for rejections, analysis and synthesis of information coupled with the use of memos and annotations, broad themes were obtained. These are: (1) pragmatic considerations (2) value addition or research contribution (3) breadth and depth (4) methodological aspects (5) findings (6) conclusion (6) reference list. Furthermore various subthemes were explored under the broad themes. For example, under pragmatic considerations, unclear research question or problem statement, failure to articulate the type of review being conducted and poor structure (weak abstract, unclear introduction and justification for conducting the review) were someone the subthemes derived from literature. It was essential

to explore these themes and subthemes in detail. The papers reviewed were largely qualitative and descriptive in nature and ranged from those published in 1997 and 2019. The limited number of articles points to the scarcity in literature that focuses specifically on literature review as a stand-alone method as the majority were focusing on literature review as a complementary method to empirical research. Bandara et al. (2015) acknowledge that articles focus on the weaknesses in review articles and how to enhance them are scarce despite the high rejection of the articles by journals. The researcher therefore took a reflective account of the research question. The researcher tried to be as comprehensive as possible and the studies were critically analysed and synthesised without focusing on methodological quality in order to maintain breadth and depth, since the relevant studies left were few as suggested by Kornhaber et al. (2016). These results were grouped together in tabular form in relation to theme of pitfalls identified and presented as shown in Table 2. The other results were narratively explained. The next section presents the body of the review through discussions of various diverging and converging opinions on the themes presented above, with the hope of synthesising areas of convergence and divergence that emerge during the review. For each theme or subtheme, possible guidelines to mitigating the pitfalls are discussed as well.

### 3.	Literature Review

Reviews critically evaluate published work and often give room for the building of new conceptual frameworks (Snyder, 2019). They are an avenue to unpack inconsistencies in the extant body of knowledge, synthesise an array of results and ultimately providing researchers with a 'state of the art snapshot of the area under investigation (Palmatier, Houston, & Hulland, 2018). Review articles are a pivotal part of research as they can be employed in order to answer specific research questions, evaluate theoretical assumptions, methodological choices and substantive domain in order to holistically give an understanding of the research topic (Palmatier et al., 2018; Webster & Watson, 2002). Reviews can contribute to research domains in various ways and the nature of the contributions made is dependent on the type of review adopted and the how the research question is framed or what the problem being investigated is (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019). To make an impact or worthwhile value addition, reviews must be undertaken in a research area that allows for one to be undertaken effectively, there must be available prior studies to provide researchers with a platform to select, integrate and synthesise. In addition, the review article must be well written, with balanced literature review and synthesis of findings that shows adequate breadth and depth otherwise the article could be considered as inferior work thus negatively affecting quality, rigor and usability. Lastly critical analysis and synthesis are key in any review study to make a valuable contribution to research, failure of which will render the study useless and unpublishable as it might be viewed as simply a collection of studies that merely gives a weak description of past research (Palmatier et al., 2018; Snyder, 2019). Despite the availability of some guidelines and standards provided in literature, review article rejections are arguably high (Wee & Banister, 2016). This section provides a review of literature on the potential contributions of reviews briefly and goes in depth to explore the common pitfalls or traps (suggesting possible ways of remedying or avoiding them) that reviewers fall into, that make it difficult for review articles to get published.

### 3.1	Why conduct reviews (purpose, benefits and contributions)?

Further to benefits discussed above, reviews can be conducted in order to fulfil various objectives. The research field being explored, the research question or problem statement being answered as well as the type of review selected influence the nature of the contribution that can originate from the researcher (Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

Some of the general contributions are discussed here. Baumeister and Leary (1997:312), summarise five major objectives of review articles: conceptualisation and development of theory, evaluation of new or existing theory, providing useful overviews and integration of the knowledge in an area, problem identification and finally to give a historical account of the research area or theory development in the area. Reviews can be effective tools for knowledge development, extension and refinement. Through the amalgamation of connections and trends among research findings from different studies, literature review ensures that a research problem is addressed with power, depth and rigor that is not possible with one research study (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Cronin et al., 2008; Snyder, 2019). Through the use of literature review as a research methodology, researchers can thoroughly examine literature, draw the areas of consensus and inconsistencies (contradictions) among researchers as well as to identify gaps. Researchers can go further to explore the justifications for the status quo, showing whether the agreements or disagreements are due to the differences in the study setting, the way the research questions are framed, the epistemological and ontological perspectives adopted or perhaps the methodology employed. This gives readers a deeper insight into the subject area, providing them with vital information on the moderating, mediating, explanatory and differentiating factors (Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Cronin et al., 2008; Denyer & Tranfield, 2015; Palmatier et al., 2018). As explained further by Palmatier et al. (2018), reviews can be used as tools to iron out ambiguities in the area being explored for example, in definitions or measurement of variables. Reviews can also be used to assess theoretical frameworks, methodological assumptions used or even to develop a conceptual framework to help reconcile, explain and extend prior research (Chen et al., 2016; Wee & Banister, 2016; Xiao & Watson, 2019). Literature reviews can help unravel what is known and unknown in the chosen research area thus providing future researchers with state of the art knowledge in the area that they can use to have an overview of the research area without necessarily going in-depth in individual studies (Bandara, Miskon, & Fielt, 2011; Levy & Ellis, 2006). As outlined earlier, what contribution a review article makes depends on the type of review being conducted. Table 1 provides a summary of few selected reviews types to show how these have varying characteristics, are used for different purposes and having varying implications, for a more detailed outline of literature review typologies readers can refer to researchers such as Grant and Booth (2009), Paré et al. (2015), Paré and Kitsiou (2017) and Xiao and Watson (2019).

3.2   Pitfalls and difficulties faced by researchers that often lead to rejections of Reviews by Journals

Notwithstanding the fact that reviews are a very crucial component of researcher, having a review article accepted for publication is a daunting task (Snyder, 2019; Wee & Banister, 2016). Several different reasons have been proffered by researchers to explain why some reviews are rejected or don't get published in high quality journals even when they appear well written. Snyder (2019), tables four key issues: (1) the lack of clear research strategy that ultimately informs the other aspects such as how studies included in the review were selected, the criteria for choosing them, the quality of the research process, the weaknesses on the research strategy or study selection strategy and how these were mitigated and how data was analysed. (2) Having overly narrow research sample that negatively impacts on the findings and contributions of the study (3) the inability to clearly and logically present and discuss research findings of the literature review conducted (4) Researchers are often unable to show "a truly valuable contribution to the field" (Snyder, 2019:338). Wee and Banister (2016) on the other hand, analogously submit that the issue of added value is largely problematic for researchers as it does not come out explicitly in most cases leading to non-acceptance of some papers.

Secondly the researchers advance that a lack of clarity in stating the objectives and explicating in the conclusion how these have been addressed throughout the study compounds the problem. Thirdly structural weaknesses, incomplete evidence or lack of thoroughness can lead to rejections. In seeking to understand these challenges to conducting quality reviews that tell a coherent story, Chen et al. (2016), conceptualise four challenges that they identified in the form of a framework and these are: "linguistic, methodological, conceptual and ontological" issues. Webster and Watson (2002) argue that researchers often find their papers not publishable because they fail to address four vital considerations that reviewers pay attention to. These four are summarised as follows: "contribution ("what's new?"), impact ("so what?"), logic ("why so?") thoroughness ("well done?")" (Webster & Watson, 2002): The issue of knowledge contribution is pivotal for any research to be considered worthwhile as affirmed by Bandara et al. (2011:1) who emphasise that researchers must always strive to show how the current research contributes "something new to the overall body of knowledge or advances the research's field of knowledge and when relevant propose a research agenda for the topic under investigation". Knopf (2006:129) advances that another common ditch that review articles find themselves falling into is one of poor presentation and discussion of findings. Authors fail to give meanings to the findings or somehow group them to reflect perhaps disciplinary backgrounds or perspectives of the researchers. For example, in taxation, it could be the taxpayer's view, the regulator's perspective, the government, the economist or even the fiscal sociologist's view. The challenges briefly discussed above and some others that are evident for literature were grouped together in terms of their interconnectedness (Pragmatic considerations, value addition or contribution, breadth and depth of review, methodological aspects, findings and conclusions) and discussed individually with possible ways of mitigating them below.

3.2.1 Pragmatic considerations

In review research article non-acceptance is often related to issues to do with unclear research question or problem statement, lack of clarity in objectives, failure to articulate clearly the choice of the review adopted and not having a clear structure of the review. Denyer and Tranfield (2015) table that most rejected papers tend to have weaknesses in the introduction, abstract and sampling of studies justification. These various aspects are individually reviewed under the subsections that follow.

3.2.1.1 Unclear research question or problem statement

This is one of the most important elements of a research, as this basically outlines the main purpose of the study stating what is being investigated. Often researchers carrying out reviews fail to articulate clearly the research problem or the research question is too broad and is not appropriately narrowed. Reiterating the need to have a clearly defined question to allow for easy definition of key terms and phrases for the review, Coughlan, Cronin, and Ryan (2007:660) advance that the purpose of the study, aims, objectives, research questions or any hypothesis should be clearly connected and the link between how the study is conducted made clear. A clearly articulated research question is essential to guide the entire methodology, guide the search and selection of relevant literature (papers should be restricted to those that are focused in addressing the research question) and lastly orient the analysis and synthesis process, yet Xiao and Watson (2019) advance that researchers often select research questions that are too broad. A research question that is too broad would widen the scope of the review and articles included, thus resulting in gathering of thick data which becomes difficult to manage and sift through. How to narrow the topic becomes problematic, data analysis becomes unfeasible and unmanageable as researchers find it difficult to separate trivial information from

significant information (Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Hart, 2018; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The research question must be relevant to the subject area being explored, there is no point in answering a research question that no one is asking or that does not add value in the area being investigated. It is therefore important for researchers undertaking a review to consider topic or question selection to be a continuous process that requires scoping, previewing, mapping and thorough review of literature in the subject area under study (Snyder, 2019; Wee & Banister, 2016). This is vital in order to form a clear relationship of the studies undertaken so far in the area and the research question at hand, possible subtopics or themes that could emerge, thus assess the practicability of undertaking a comprehensive review (Webster & Watson, 2002; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The research problem and objectives of the study must be clearly explained and be congruent with the findings and conclusions. In affirmation Wee and Banister (2016) state that it is important that a review presents its objectives in the introduction and return to articulate how these were addressed in the conclusion, otherwise a research whose aims are not achieved often faces rejection as there is no value addition. A researchable topic or question can be an identified problem or knowledge gap that may originate from observed inconsistent or contradictory results and conclusions from particular research studies in the area of interest after a comprehensive literature review of the body of knowledge in the area.

3.2.1.2   Failure to clearly articulate the type of review being undertaken

There seems to be a link between the proper articulation of the research question, objectives of the study and choice of review type. For a review to be properly focused, all its aspects such as the review protocol or process, search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria for literature, data analysis, extraction, synthesis and presentation should all be tailored to address the research question or problem (Xiao & Watson, 2019). The challenge for researchers is how to make that match or maintain the fit. In most review articles the methodology section is usually skipped or researchers just refer to the fact that a comprehensive literature review was undertaken without outlining the actual type of review undertaken (Is it a narrative, scoping, systematic, integrative or meta-analysis review and why?) or going into details as to why the type adopted (if identified) was considered the most appropriate (in terms of the research question and objectives of the study). Due to limited guidelines about how to assess the quality of literature review, researchers in some cases fail to maintain the congruence between the type of review that the researcher purported to have been conducting and what they actually did (Coughlan & Cronin, 2016):7. Literature offers different types of research reviews and their different features (Grant & Booth, 2009; Paré & Kitsiou, 2017; Paré et al., 2015). For example, a narrative review is considered a less rigorous type of review that can either be broad or specific but is less precise and systematic than the protocol-guided type of review which characterises a systematic review. A narrative review can be helpful when providing a relationship between various aspects of a certain topic or even suggesting a completely new interpretation altogether to the topic or part of the topic under review (Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Paré et al., 2015):13 On the other hand an integrative or critical review is sometimes undertaken to create novel perspectives or different conceptualisation of the topic or to reframe viewpoints on the phenomenon and to contribute to the generation of new knowledge foundation by informing policy, practice and research (Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019) Re-affirming the need to clearly delineate the review approach selected, Coughlan & Cronin (2016:30) argue that "There is no single type of "ideal" literature review but a range of methods that need to be adapted appropriately depending on the focus of the review". It is therefore important that a researcher selects a review that suits the research purpose, the purpose can be "to describe or scope a body of work, to test a specific hypothesis, to extend from existing

studies to build theory, or to critically evaluate a body of work" (Xiao & Watson, 2019:109). For example, a scoping or even a narrative review might be more appropriate as opposed to a systematic one, where the purpose of the study is to summarise and analyse a wide research area or multiple research areas. In cases where the main aim is to systematically investigate, analyse and synthesise findings on a particular concept, a systematic review might be ideal (Snyder, 2019:336). Table 1 gives a brief overview of the types of reviews and their features. It is therefore important for researchers not to take the issue of reviews typology for granted, but strive to understand the characteristics of reviews especially their choice of review, its conceptualisation as well as categorisation and accordingly the relevant research protocol in order to contextualise the choice appropriately to the study at hand as guided by the purpose of the review.

Table 1: Brief Summary of Selected Review types

Review Type	Explanations	Brief methodology description	Researchers
Narrative	• An assessment and evaluation of past or current publications applying different levels of comprehensiveness and is unstructured. • The lack of standard structure leads to subjectivity and bias in the review. It focuses on describing theories, concepts, methods and research results. • Does not seek generalisability. Important questions are, what is available in the area and what are the major features of this knowledge?	• May or may not apply formal quality assessment. • Data extraction is neither standardised nor systematic. • It largely adopts narrative analysis, juxtaposition of evidence and synthesis of data. • Persuasive presentation of findings to support conclusions drawn.	(Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006; Juntunen & Lehenkari, 2019; Paré et al., 2015; Xiao & Watson, 2019)
Critical or integrative	• Critical evaluation and interpretation of available literature in a subject area. Comprehensive methodological approach. • The objective is to unpack strengths, weaknesses, contradictions, controversies and inform scholars on the gaps. • Often leads to new conceptual or theoretical models. Key questions can focus on the valuable works in the area, justification for the value and outlining the major arguments	• Assess, critique and synthesise literature on a chosen topic or research question. • Evaluates in line with contribution. • Can focus on a narrow or broad research question. • Largely has qualitative output that follows some taxonomy or some other classification such as conceptual, thematic or content	(Denyer & Tranfield, 2015; Grant & Booth, 2009; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008; Snyder, 2019; Souza, Silva, & Carvalho, 2010)
Scoping	• Provides a preliminary insight on the potential size, breadth and nature of extant literature on the emerging research question or topic.	• Comprehensive search, inclusion and exclusion criteria to be outlined.	(Grant & Booth, 2009;

	• Illuminating the degree, range and characteristics of research activities in the area can show a snapshot of the area • Can highlight whether there is potential to undertake integrative, systematic or meta-analysis reviews. For example, investigating the use and operationalisation of the saturation concept in selecting samples in qualitative tax studies.	• Output may be synthesised and presented in narrative and tabular form maybe grouping studies by design or some important features such as research focus, methodology and context.	Xiao & Watson, 2019)
Systematic	• Aims to systematically search and identify, studies, extract, analyse and synthesise information guided by some pre-established guidelines (these could be study design, methodology, findings, year of publication or findings) or research protocol. • Protocol must be well defined, rigorous to allow for standardisation and replicability of the view. • Focus is on identifying, evaluating thoughtfully and synthesising all literature in the topic as opposed to the narrative approach, where the summary is done for a number of studies	• Follows a highly standardised research protocol to select studies, assess quality and relevance. • It is thus highly structured in outline, analysis, synthesis and presentation. • Eligibility of sampled studies informed by an explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. • Analysis largely quantitative in nature though it can be qualitative at times. Findings can help inform policy and practice	(Cronin et al., 2008; Denyer & Tranfield, 2015; Grant & Booth, 2009; Palmatier et al., 2018; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008; Snyder, 2019; Souza et al., 2010)
State of the art review	• Focuses on more current issues in the subject area. Key questions focus on what is new, novel or contemporary in the area under research	• Detailed search of current literature, follows no formal assessment quality and is narrative in nature. • Outlines the current state of knowledge in the area and contextualises priorities for further exploration and research.	(Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Grant & Booth, 2009)
Meta-analysis	• Statistically collates the outcomes of quantitative studies to provide a more focused result. • Integrates together data of various studies to improve estimates and address uncertainties and disagreements in individual studies, enhance objectivity and validity as well as understanding of results. • The review can be used to unveil patterns and relationships, build more generalised statements on the	• Comprehensive in nature, inclusion and exclusion decisions on studies might be informed by some quality or sensitivity assessment. • Include meta-regression of results • Outcomes presented graphical, numerical and supported with	(Cronin et al., 2008; Grant & Booth, 2009; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008; Souza et al., 2010; Xiao &

	studies reviewed and draw conclusions.	textual information and tables	Watson, 2019)

Source: Own Compilation from various authors

3.2.1.3   No evident structure or poor structure of the research paper.

While the necessity of reviews is well appreciated in research, very minimal attention has been given to the underlying structure and guidelines on how to carry out and present effective literature reviews (Bandara et al., 2011). The way the review is organised, especially its structure is vital for its comprehensiveness (Cronin et al., 2008), disorganisation could point to lack of confidence, weak evidence or lack of thought in the review process (Wee & Banister, 2016; Xiao & Watson, 2019). In consonance, Denyer and Tranfield (2015) show that 58. 4% of review manuscripts are rejected because of a poor writing style and 34.6% for the poor structure. For any review article it is always pivotal to clearly communicative the motivation and need for the review especially in the introduction. The structure to a greater extent will depend on the type of review undertaken, the type of information needed and the level of detail required and these aspects vary in line with the different types of reviews and the purpose of the review, but what is key is that there must be a clear structure that seamlessly binds the concepts and sections in the article (Denney & Tewksbury, 2013; Snyder, 2019). A paper that is weakly constructed and is not presented in a constructively critical, interpretative and authoritative manner is more likely to face rejection (Wee & Banister, 2016). There is need for a clear and logical research process that guides the structure of the review by connecting the introduction (research question, purpose and objectives of the study), the actual review, the theoretical perspectives, the methodology adopted, how data was analysed and synthesised together with the presentation and discussion of findings (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Coughlan et al., 2007; Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). The other identified pitfall is on the abstract. In one review paper, one reviewer criticised the paper for having an introduction that is the same as the abstract, an abstract that is poor and does not clearly show the objectives of the research and its findings. The paper must have an introductory section, the body and conclusion (Knopf, 2006). The introductory section must introduce the reader to the purpose of the study. Despite these observations some review articles are rejected on the basis of having no chronological structure (Wee & Banister, 2016). In consonance Webster and Watson (2002:xv) argue that in some review articles "the topic does not 'emerge' until well into the article". It is crucial that researcher uses the introduction to capture the interest of the readers, by motivating the research question, providing clear definitions for the main variable(s) and describing fully the article's contribution. Another common ditch, that researchers fall into is that despite the fact that reviews are by their nature highly cited, some authors tend to fail to situate studies in a broader context, "stack" references, use too old and out of date references or not cite important sources in the field (Denyer & Tranfield, 2015).

3.2.2   Value Addition or Research contribution

The most important pitfall that makes it problematic for reviews to get anywhere close to publication is the issue of added value, value addition or research contribution (Snyder, 2019; Webster & Watson, 2002; Wee & Banister, 2016) or "contribution to knowledge concept" (Knopf, 2006). This is one aspect that is argued to be generally lacking in some reviews, Emphasising the importance of having a visible contribution Snyder (2019) submits that "no matter how excellent and rigorous the review article, if it does not provide enough of a

contribution, something new, it will not be published" and Denyer and Tranfield (2015) aver that an estimated 60.3% of papers are rejected because of failure to convincingly justify and show the significance of the study. Literature review must go beyond just collating past research, but must also strive to identify gaps, justify the significance of the current or future research and critically evaluate past research (Chen et al., 2016). The question is, how does a researcher undertake a research that provides a "truly valuable contribution" to the body of knowledge in the subject area? (Snyder, 2019):338. Before a review is conducted it is imperative for the researcher to investigate why one should be conducted and whether there is a clear need for the review and then decide which type of review would be the most appropriate and would result in the greatest value addition in the subject area (Snyder, 2019). Knopf (2006) suggests that in trying to identify a knowledge, policy or methodology gap in which the current research can contribute, it is essential that researchers group the findings from available literature into three categories. These are the areas of convergence among studies and researchers, their areas of disagreement and lastly what they take for granted, ignore or fail to pay close attention to (gaps). To successfully decipher and group literature in the manner suggested by Knopf (2006) is often daunting for novice researchers who lack confidence to critically review literature, Chen et al. (2016) refer to these as conceptual challenges. The question is how to address the challenges.

It is crucial to closely and critically analyse the outcomes in each group. For example, for the areas of agreement (conventional wisdom), whether in a positive or negative way, it will be naïve for a researcher to uncritically and unquestionably accept these. If there is a possible rationale to doubt conventional wisdom or it appears inconclusive, this could be a likely area to research on and add value. On the other hand, for areas of debate and dissension, an investigation into whether the disagreements can be an indication of a new school of thought or whether the conflicting ideas can be evaluated for cogency and reasonableness can represent a vital contribution. In some cases, these differences could be due to varying assumptions, theoretical perspectives and the evidence used or even the methodology employed (Knopf, 2006; Webster & Watson, 2002). Just pointing areas of divergences without seeking to explore further the possible justifications and their plausibility will generally point to lack of critical assessment. Research contribution can then be constructed on the underlying area of divergence. Lastly, as for gaps they can come in different aspects, they can be narrow or wide but on their own, gaps represent fertile areas to cultivate research contribution. There appears to be a golden link between the topic or research question selection, the appropriate type of review to be undertaken and ultimately the contribution of the research. It therefore suggests that if proper steps have not been taken to identify relevant gaps to be addressed by the research, the research question cannot be properly focused or clearly articulated and failure to have clear research problem will equally cloud the selection of the appropriate review type and in the end the research contribution can be impaired. It is important that researchers undertake a comprehensive preliminary literature review to understand the research area as this would help them to formulate the research question, identify the research problem and delineate the scope as well as the purpose of the research.

The issue of value addition is pivotal to the publication of any research including reviews yet some review articles are often criticised for merely being just overviews (Wee & Banister, 2016), "medley word clouds and citation analyses" (Snyder, 2019) or "mind-numbing lists of citations and findings that resemble a phonebook-impressive cases, lots of numbers but not much plot" (Bem 1995:172, as cited by Webster and Watson (2002):xiv). The research contribution can come in a variety of ways, for example, a new theoretical perspective or interpretation of findings previously considered inconsistent, contradictory or controversial or

it can be a research in a part of the topic or subtopic that was not adequately explored in previous studies or perhaps it has been scarcely investigated. In this case in order to build a truly visible research contribution, there is a need for the researcher to provide evidence from the preliminary literature review on the well-researched scholars or experts in the subject area calling for further exploration, examination, clarification and/or elaborations on the grey areas on the topic or parts of the topic (Webster & Watson, 2002). Analogously, Denyer and Tranfield (2015):37 advance that quality reviews are constructed upon the current body of knowledge, through identification of areas of incompleteness, deficiency, inadequacy, inconclusiveness, under-development or under-investigation. Underlying propositions could then be identified and challenged, resulting in the formulation of contemporary or original research questions. This could contribute significantly to value addition or originality of the study.

Researchers could perhaps start by identifying and discussing past research in the area pinpointing the noted research gaps and elucidating on those put forward by other scholars as well as highlighting who these scholars are. The researcher can then propose which gap(s) the current research sought to fill and how. The researcher can then further explain the important or envisaged implications or value that could be drawn from this study. This is not an easy task for reviewer researchers especially novice reviewers as acknowledged by Chen et al. (2016):52, who advance that in some cases researchers fail to perceive themselves as qualified, "competent and confident reviewers" and thus negatively impact on the quality of their reviews. This can lead to failure to explicate gaps or address them accordingly where reviewers have no confidence to critique or express their opinion on the work others. This suggests perhaps a need for more research on how an effective literature review can be conducted, with researchers able to construct new knowledge upon the foundation laid by past research.

3.2.3   Breadth and Depth of Review

It is commonly very challenging for researchers undertaking reviews to strike a balance between the depth and breadth of the study (Denyer & Tranfield, 2015). Questions such as how wide or broad should the research question be or the literature review be without compromising feasibility and being manageable always linger. How narrow is narrow enough? Bandara et al. (2011):51 avow that researchers must frame research questions and select papers that give them enough information "to review within a feasible and justifiable scope". While a number of researchers advocate for narrowing and focusing the research question to enable the maintaining of quality, rigor and depth in reviews (Bandara et al., 2011; Hart, 2018; Xiao & Watson, 2019), Snyder (2019) submits that in some instances, in the quest to narrow down the sample or the scope of review, researchers constrict the span and the search overly which ends up unfavourably affecting depth and rigor, resultantly impacting negatively on the findings and research contribution. It is therefore crucial for researchers to perhaps revisit the research question in relation to the available literature then may narrow the research question accordingly and provide the rationale for the decision. As expressed by Denyer and Tranfield (2015), about 30% of manuscripts rejections are as a result of weaknesses in quality and rigor. Xiao and Watson (2019) suggest piloting of the review in order to scan the literature just to assess the scope of the knowledge and the practicability of carrying out the review. The research could get a glimpse of the studies related to the research question, the likely themes, subthemes and topics that could emerge, thus allowing for one to deduce whether a comprehensive review is doable.

Knopf (2006) advocates for researchers to use "two tier circle approach" to ensure that the studies reviewed are properly focused on the research at hand. The inner circle representing

the studies that directly deal with the research question and the outer circle depicting those studies that are relevant or have an information overlap to the research question. The second tier might result in a wide range of publications being accessed and call for clear and transparent ways of narrowing the sample which can be problematic for researcher (Knopf, 2006:131). Three ways can be used for constricting the scope: selection of leading authorities in the research area, choosing the most recent studies from high quality and prestigious journals and lastly studies that are more focal to the needs of the research question (Chen et al., 2016; Cronin et al., 2008; Knopf, 2006; Snyder, 2019). The suggested criteria appears credible and convincing, but it is also fraught with subjectivity. For example, the leading scholars could point more to 'conventional wisdom' which can be the bone of contention or can overlook new schools of thought raised by contemporary researchers in the area. In addition, the focus on leading scholars which can be done through forward and backward searches through references list and those that cite the research respectively can result in the problem of "identical author risk" suggested by Jalali & Wohlin (2012). This is where the works of those leading scholars dominate the field and indirectly their views being predominant in the review, thus bringing in an element of bias. Secondly a focus only on recent studies might rob research of the vital contextual background information on the origins and developments overtime that can be necessary to fully and comprehensively evaluate the body of knowledge in the area. The idea is to begin with a narrow focus but broaden as need be, but how to do so effectively continues to be challenging in light of the judgement and subjectivity surrounding the whole process. Further highlighting the challenges in breadth and depth considerations, Baumeister and Leary (1997), advance an intriguing angle pointing to two interesting facts. Firstly, that in some cases, despite having identified adequate studies (breadth) that cover the scope of the research problem, researchers tend to poorly cover the cited literature and review it in an unbalanced manner, giving more focus to certain studies and less to others (compromising depth and rigor). Secondly in some instances literature reviewers selectively critique studies or deliberately neglect critiquing some studies. The reviewer could have balanced their reviews but for the studies that support their point of view or are more inclined to it, the researcher only concentrates on the strengths, ignoring the flaws and weaknesses. For those that are contrary to the researcher's perspective the reviewer makes it a point to criticise and pinpoint the flaws and weaknesses. Contrary to enhancing the review, it might appear unbalanced and misleading and ultimately weaken its value and chances of acceptance by journals.

Within this same trap of failing to balance out scope and depth, Denyer and Tranfield (2015) and Webster and Watson (2002) express that reviewers at times fall into the pitfall of being "overly systematic or overly critical". Despite the fact that Chen et al. (2016) suggests that some reviewers lack confidence in critiquing the work of others, literature suggests that other researchers over criticise the work of others overlooking the fact that probably at the time of publication, the work was considered state of the art or the methodology used or theoretical underpinnings or theories were the best at the time (Wee & Banister, 2016). Criticism must be balanced, focused and evaluative but not a personal attack on the work of previous scholars for what they did or didn't do. The review must constructively share with readers what has been gleaned and learned from the body of knowledge in the area (Webster & Watson, 2002; Xiao & Watson, 2019). If there is a trend in the literature, is it a good or bad trend and what does it imply for current research and for future research? The other weaknesses noted in reviews is where researchers highlight the negatives or weaknesses, basically pointing to the work of others as "incompetent or inadequate" (Webster & Watson, 2002), without showing the positive or how current research builds on the strength and weaknesses on the body of knowledge to add value to the research arena. In some cases, the author's voice appears to have drowned in the

literature as depicted by the overuse of direct quotations. The visibility of the author's voice and succinct in writing the review cannot be overemphasised.

3.2.4   Methodological aspects

Failure to explain clearly and transparently the methodological journey adopted in undertaking review is one of the biggest stumbling blocks to the credibility or reviews. Methodology deficiency is ranked as the major reason for review article rejection, with Denyer and Tranfield (2015) estimating that nearly 74.3% of manuscripts are rejected because of poor methodology or failure to persuasively rationalise the methodology or even describe it clearly. A clear methodology is not only essential in enriching research quality but can boost reliability as the steps can be retraced and replicated for reproducing, cross checking and verifying the findings (Palmatier et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2007; Xiao & Watson, 2019). Despite the availability of studies that give guidance on how to conduct literature reviews or use reviews as a stand-alone methodology (Snyder, 2019; Wee & Banister, 2016; Xiao & Watson, 2019), the bulk of review articles scantily describe their research methodology or the section is totally ignored and missing in the article. Re-affirming this challenge, Snyder (2019):338 states that "these reviews often fail to provide details of the overall research strategy, the selection and exclusion of articles, the limitations of the search method, and the quality of the search process and they often lack details of how the analysis was considered". It therefore makes it nearly impossible for reviewers to judge the quality and contribution of the review article which are pivotal to the acceptance decisions on an article. Xiao and Watson (2019:102) table a seven step protocol that can be adopted to explain review research process or methodology: research problem formulation, establishing a review protocol, undertaking the literature search, screening for exclusion and inclusion basing on some set criteria, data extraction, data analysis and synthesis and lastly communication of findings. How this protocol is adapted will depend on the nature of the research question and review type chosen as some are more systematic and standardised (systematic and meta-analysis reviews than the others which are semi-systematic (critical or integrative) or even unsystematic (narrative and scoping reviews). Reviewers must always consult review typologies submitted by various scholars (Grant & Booth, 2009; Paré & Kitsiou, 2017; Paré et al., 2015). Failure to clearly, accurately and transparently explicate the research process and methodological journey renders the research difficult to assess for depth rigor or even validity against the characteristic of the review type purported to have been adopted. It becomes impossible to replicate the study or even evaluate its contribution, because what might be considered useful and acceptable in one review type might be considered fundamentally flawed and not adding value in another review type.

Reiterating the methodological challenges but from a slightly different perspective Chen et al. (2016) advance that the challenge is not merely how to articulate the methodology employed but whether adequate methodology has been used that can result in quality and credible reviews. The researchers table four important processes that are key in the methodological journey: "scoping, analysis, synthesis and discussion" (Chen et al., 2016:50). Researchers struggle with how to address these aspects, perhaps this explains why they fail to explain the methodological process they followed. It might not be a matter of ignoring or taking for granted the need to outline the methodological journey but an issue of not being sure or clear on what they did. Templier and Pare (2018) emphasis on the need to document methodology clear to ensure transparency, auditability and reproducibility.

As highlighted earlier literature reviews are often time consuming and challenging especially which articles to choose, the extent of literature inclusion and why. Researchers both

seasoned and novice but especially upcoming researchers find it problematic to delineate a workable and feasible scope and justify the delimitation, they are not sure on which studies to select and how to judge the quality of the studies as they search through. The searches of databases like Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, Proquest, Emerald Journals, Science Direct, Business Searching Interface, AIS Electronic Library, Springer link, Wiley Online Library, EBSCO host among others, can avail large amount of studies and how to sift through and narrow the sample becomes challenging. In some cases, even where the scoping has been done appropriately by selecting and using relevant key terms, words and phrases to search data bases or using other transparent search strategy, researchers tend to have difficulties in analysis.

3.2.4.1 Poor analysis of reviewed literature

Analysis refers to surfing important and relevant information as well as deconstructing it from all that has been read. In most cases researchers lack analytic and interpretative competencies or fail to employ these effectively and instead of having an analysis the review ends up being just weak discussions or repetitions of the discussion section in the reviewed studies without much interpretation or deduction of meaning or alternative meaning (Chen et al., 2016; Palmatier et al., 2018). This results in shallow findings leading to rejection of review articles or impairment of their usability. The question is how can researchers improve their technical, intellectual skills in order to be confident literature reviewers? The use of information technology can help enhance data analysis in reviews. A combination of using reference management software (Mendeley, Evernote, Endnote, Refworks and Citav) and qualitative data software tools such as Atlas.ti, leximancer, QDA miner, NVIVO and MAXDA, could boost the validity of findings (Bandara et al., 2015; Beekhuyzen, Nielsen and von Hellens, 2010). The qualitative tools can enable the storage of papers using meta characteristics such as years, sources and authors. One can then easily export papers from the reference management databases using tools such as NVIVO. Analysis can then be done as content or thematic analysis by extracting and synthesising data inductively and/or deductively, thus maintaining an audit trail. Memos and annotations can also be effective avenues to maintain an audit trail. Such steps would essentially improve the reliability, reproducibility, credibility and trustworthiness of the study. A clear coding process can be undertaken using the qualitative analysis software. This could allow for inter coder reliability evaluation and reporting, hence allowing for the assessment of the coding process and the corroboration of the codes. In short, findings can be supported or traced back to evidence gleaned from the review.

3.2.5 Findings

Commonly, the issue of clarity and congruence of findings to the objectives of the study is problematic in research. Similarly, researchers conducting reviews normally fail to present and discuss their findings in a cogent and persuasive manner (Snyder, 2019), yet the quality of research and whether it addressed its aims and objectives is measured by its output, how the findings have been collated and reported (Knopf, 2006). Review articles often fail to clearly explain the key definitions, assumption, constructs and theories (Palmatier et al., 2018). Denyer and Tranfield (2015) posit that 25% of rejected manuscripts normally have deficiencies in in data analysis and 27.6% have weaknesses in the discussion of findings. This is also compounded by the voluminous literature reviewed. In order to address this potential pitfall, researchers could use tables and figures that have coherent headings and subheadings to integrate and synthesis knowledge. Notwithstanding the criticality of using figures and tables in review articles, the challenge is often these tables are not comprehensive enough or are indigestible to

the readers. The insights to be gleaned are not so clear, the tables are not focused or are too long. In agreement, Snyder (2019:338) states that "often large number of different graphs, tables and figures is included, but not remarked on or explained". It is important for authors to ensure that they give meaning to the information displays they have made as well as to contextualise their findings to the objectives of the study in order to maintain visibility of the research contribution. Adequately explaining the findings can ensure that the research can enhance knowledge development (create something new and valuable from the research gaps), extend knowledge or build theory as opposed to simply aggregating studies together. In consonance Chen et al. (2016), adduce that it is largely a challenge of failure to synthesise that makes it difficult for authors to present information, how to sort and organise the results in terms of thematic, content or conceptual considerations becomes problematic. Denyer and Tranfield (2015) confirm the difficulties faced by researchers in literature analysis and synthesis, advancing that it is largely challenging how to breakdown the literature review in various components or themes than showing how these themes relate. Researchers often fail to systematically and convincingly extract theories, concepts, arguments that show consensus or disagreements and the relevant gaps as well as methodological perspectives. Even in cases where for example, a certain way of analysis has been chosen researchers tend to sequentially present the findings without comprehensively discussing them. For instance, where thematic analysis is the chosen analysis approach, there must be a logical connection from one thematic section to the other (Cronin et al., 2008), it must be clear how these themes or subthemes are linked or interconnected. Otherwise the absence of the link robs the review article of consistency, chronology and continuity.

Researchers often present research findings following an author centric approach as opposed to the recommended concept-centric approach (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Webster & Watson, 2002), presenting findings from research as stand-alone items with no thread connecting them. Knopf (2006:129) recommends that authors could present their studies using some form of grouping, perhaps in line with "schools of thought" or theories they support, the methodological stance they adopt or different policy prescriptions they advocate for or are inclined to. Authors can use some form or another of "content-related clustering" as a way of analysis and presentation (Wee & Banister, 2016:285). Concurring on the weaknesses on presentation and discussion of findings, Chen et al. (2016:52) and Cronin et al. (2008) assert that the trap is further compounded by the ontological challenge of the lack of a confident voice. In the discussion of findings in some cases the author's voice is invisible, possibly because the author somehow feels incapable of assessing and expressing views on the work of other seemingly seasoned scholars or how to distinguish their own views from those of previous researchers. Researchers fail to judge the limitations, consistencies or inconsistencies on the work of others or express views on the methodology used. The vital question is; how can researcher confidence be built? Is it perhaps an issue of lack of researcher identity or the paucity in comprehensive understanding of the research area or even inadequacies in research synthesising skills.

3.2.6   Conclusion

In some cases, review articles fail to go back to the objectives and research and draw conclusions on their achievement or the conclusion is deemed to be weak by reviewers. The conclusion fails to give a snapshot synopsis of the findings, current knowledge and reiterate the contribution of the study (Cronin et al., 2008). Denyer and Tranfield (2015) suggest that 25% of manuscript rejections have shortcomings in the way the research is concluded and 23.6%

have a disorganised reference section. Reaffirming the inadequacies in conclusions, Palmatier et al. (2018) asseverate that authors tend to forget to share the limitations of their reviews as well as the implications (for policy, practice, knowledge development and research) depending on the rationale and type of the review or suggested avenues for further research by pointing out the unresolved questions or topics in the areas (Baumeister & Leary, 1997), thus watering down the value addition of the articles. Suggested areas for future research can provide a stimulus for research and make more visible what remains to be explored thus influencing the research area and giving future researchers ammunition to defend the contribution of their research. As expostulated by Denyer and Tranfield (2015), in a review article, authors must make efforts to conclude their work in a reasonable manner that takes the reader back to the objectives and evidence to support the findings and the absence together with inadequacies in such evidence. Provision of evidence to support any conclusions allows reviewers and readers to make their own judgements on the conclusions drawn or enable them to deduce their own conclusions.

3.2.7   Incomplete reference list and other general sloppy actions

There are some seemingly less important practices that researchers take for granted but have a bearing on the review output, quality and credibility. These include: not documenting the research process sufficiently, wrongly referencing quotes, tables and figures adopted from previous studies and most significantly failure to maintain a complete and comprehensive full citation list (Cronin et al., 2008; Denyer & Tranfield, 2015). The reference list is part of a valuable contribution by any research article as it provides a tool to check the validity of findings, their reliability and an acknowledgement of the work others .Reference management software tools such as Endnote, Mendeley, Citav and Evernote among others, can be used to maintain the reference list to assure accuracy. Citation analysis tools such as cite spacing can also be helpful (Bandara et al., 2015). Lastly on the other general actions that weaken the quality of reviews, Webster and Watson (2002) add the tone of the articles and refers to the language used in the reviews, that it must be appropriate and reflective. This is often challenging for researchers due to the diverse backgrounds perhaps this takes us to the linguistic challenge suggested by Chen et al. (2016). Language pitfalls encompasses the use of non-academic language as well as the failure to appropriately use transition words to connect ideas, sentences and paragraphs. Words such as furthermore, in addition or again can be employed to further the same idea. Those including on the contrary, conversely, nevertheless and however can be applied to introduce and different idea. Lingard (2018) discusses the language aspect from the angle of citation verbs, arguing that citation is highly nuanced than what researchers perceive it be (citation strategy). The researchers advance that the way verbs are used in literature review position the writer in the context of the reviewed literature in terms of neutrality about the knowledge (verbs such as comments, states and notes), affiliation with the knowledge (recognises, reveals and argues etc) or outright distancing themselves from the knowledge (contends, claims and assumes among others) (Lingard, 2018:134). It is not only important to acknowledge the work of others, but also how to do so effectively and appropriately. It is one weakness the researchers emphasise on review papers revealing that, how to consciously and strategically review literature is a daunting task. In some cases, researchers fail to employ prepositional terms to connect views from different scholars together in a way that brings out how they relate (similar, relating or contrasting). Though this use of verbs sounds subjective and difficult but it brings a controversial but important aspect. For example, words such as in acknowledgement, affirmation and agreement to signal similarity in opinions. Despite the

language background, researchers must strive to use appropriate and clear language in communicating the process, importance and contribution of their review articles.

4. Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The reviewed literature provides evidence that it is indeed challenging to effectively use literature review as a stand-alone method and that is important to address the common pitfalls to effectively conducting publishable reviews. It was also evident from literature that some seemingly overlooked issues include the reference list, the structure of the article, the tone and language used in the review. The other challenge was especially the use of citation verbs in a way that exhibits their power in reflecting the nature and the cogency of the author's own contributions, findings and conclusions to literature as well as to clearly display the connection among researchers in the field together with the relationship between their findings. The effective use of the citation verbs strengthens the flow of the article as well as its quality. Reviews were found to be very pivotal aspects of research, as they were found to be effective tools to bring together information from various studies under one study and as a route to advance knowledge in the chosen research area. Several guidelines were found out from literature to improve rigour and quality in review articles hence increasing their opportunities of being accepted and published and these are presented in Table 2. The results are presented in the sections that follows in tabular and narrative form.

4.1   Importance of Conducting Effective Reviews

Reviews were found out to be time consuming and labour intensive to conduct yet they provide very useful platform for researchers to debate, widen, deepen and refine each other's works, views and contributions thus extending knowledge generation in the area being studied. Literature reviews through summaries or synopses of current knowledge critically show the development of knowledge and its evolution in a chosen research domain thus contextualising the origins and other changes that took place in the domain to give an overview of the research area and an amalgamation of current researches in the area giving a state of the art knowledge in the subject area. Reviews can be an inspiration and stimulus for new avenues in research and a way of gaining an intimate understanding of the topic while unravelling areas of concurrence and disagreement among researchers as well as the sources of the inconstancies and controversies and showing research voids to be explored. Review articles can be a start point and fertile ground for novice scholars in the area to gain an understanding of the research area as well as the research gaps they can pursue instead of doing what has already been done. Despite the exciting reasons why reviews are important in research, they are less popular due to high rejection rates and the hard work required to make them a success.

4.2   Common Pitfalls for Review Article Authors and suggested guidelines

This section discusses the common traps that researchers fall in when conducting reviews ultimately limiting their chances of publishing. Considering that reviews are a lot of work and that because of their nature the revision process is a bit long as there is need to revisit and reinterpret the previously reviewed literature on which the review article was built on. It is therefore, important to know the potential pitfalls, their implications and possible guidelines to improve reviews in order to minimise the revisions that could be required by reviewers or outright rejections. The notable pitfalls were: vague problem statement, too broad research questions, weak article structure, poor methodology sections as well as weaknesses in literature

analysis and synthesis that gave rise to weak findings and poor conclusions. Table 2 presents these findings.

Table 2: Pitfalls, their implications and suggested guidelines to improve reviews

Pitfall/Challenge	Implications	Guidelines to ameliorate the pitfall	Researcher (s)
Vague or unclear problem statement or research question	• Problem statement becomes too broad making the review infeasible, complex and confusing, clouding the research contribution	• Researchers must comprehensively scope the research area and refine the topic, research question or problem. • Consulting experts in the identified area, might be one way to make the research question more focused.	(Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Cronin et al., 2008)
Weak article structure	• Articles that are disorganised fail to display a coherent structure that consummates well with the research question and extracted data and fail to show the golden link between the introduction, methodology, data analysis and reporting of findings through to the conclusion. • Researcher must take cognisance of the differences in the structure due to the variations in research questions and differing types of reviews.	• Different standards, criteria or measures are applied to different types of reviews, what could be considered best practice and valued added for one review type might be considered inferior for the other. • It is important for the structure to suit the review type adopted	(Cronin et al., 2008; Grant & Booth, 2009; Paré & Kitsiou, 2017; Paré et al., 2015; Snyder, 2019; Webster & Watson, 2002; Wee & Banister, 2016)
Absent or lack of detail in methodology section	• The methodology section basically gives an insight into how the research was undertaken, giving a map that can be retraced. • Failure to clearly outline the search strategy, the inclusion and exclusion criteria adopted, assessment of quality, extraction, analysis and synthesis decision makes it difficult to evaluate the quality of research, sample adequacy, contribution of the research and credibility of findings	• Review researchers must fully and transparently, describe the methodological journey, giving rationalisations for any decisions taken especially on how literature was searched, judged for quality, extracted, analysed and synthesised	(Denney & Tewksbury, 2013; Grant & Booth, 2009; Jalali & Wohlin, 2012; Levy & Ellis, 2006; Templier & Paré, 2015)
Lack of valuable contribution or value addition	• Failure to identify the gaps to be addressed by the study and to accentuate its contribution, be it, in practice, knowledge	• Review literature in-depth in the chosen area and be able to draw on the areas of convergence, pinpoint the areas of divergence and identify	(Cronin et al., 2008; Denyer & Tranfield, 2015; Knopf,

	generation, methodology or research. • Lack of contribution or value addition renders the researcher unusable. • It is important though for reviewers to make the evaluation of contribution in relation to the review type applied in the research as well as the subject area or topic being reviewed.	any areas that have been insufficiently explored, never explored or have emerged in the area (conceptual, theoretical, methodology or policy gaps) to be addressed by the current research.	2006; Snyder, 2019; Wee & Banister, 2016)
Flawed presentation and discussion of findings	• Findings are what displays and explains the outcome of the research, whether the researcher achieved the objectives of the study. • Where the findings are not clear, concise and coherent, the value addition of the research is vague too. This has led to rejections of some review articles. • The author's voice is an important tool to judge the quality of findings, a great deal of quotes in a paper can be a sign of a lost voice.	• Researchers must synthesise findings and report them collectively in terms of groups (tables, figures, charts, conceptual models) such as concepts and themes, contrary to using an author by author analysis approach. • The method of analysis must be explained and justified.	(Chen et al., 2016; Coughlan & Cronin, 2016; Knopf, 2006; Snyder, 2019)
Weak conclusion, failure to show limitations, areas of further research and recommendations	Failure to convincingly inform the readers of the conclusions drawn and or linked these to the major objectives of the study, the findings and ultimately direct the recommendations.	• Researchers must conclude their articles by taking a reflection of the overall research process. • Revisit the objectives and give insight of how they were attained and show the limitations of the study and those of the methodology used. • Add value to the research article by giving pointers to future researchers on the area on areas that need further investigation or clarification through research.	(Cronin et al., 2008; Wee & Banister, 2016)
General sloppy actions	• Lack of flexibility or being too rigid, poor reference list, improper use of language, tone or over-criticising previous work negatively affects the quality of reviews	• Researchers to keep an open mind during the review so that they can capture emerging ideas as well as to take note of unexpected findings. • Use referencing tools, like Endnote to keep track of their references. • Critique prior studies in a fair manner. For example, it might seem like the	(Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Cronin et al., 2008; Denney & Tewksbury, 2013; Denyer & Tranfield, 2015; Webster

		methodology is weak now or outdated, but it was once appropriate at the time.	& Watson, 2002; Xiao & Watson, 2019)

Source: Own Compilation from literature review

5. Conclusion, Limitations and areas of Further Research

Literature review as a research method is very important in research but it continues to be challenging for researchers to come up with articles that written in a clear, critical and convincing, supported by comprehensive findings and evidence based conclusions that add value to their unique research areas. This study sought to investigate the common pitfalls to effectively conducting reviews that result in publishable outcomes and to connect these challenges with possible guidelines to improve the quality of review articles. The notable difficulties were in the crafting of an appropriate research question to guide the review while striking a balance between the scope and depth of the review, the outline of the review article, weak methodology section, lack of clear value addition or contribution, shallow findings and poor conclusions as well as the failure to use citation language appropriately. Review articles are essentially 'gold mines' for novice researchers in an area as they provide a clear, logical and complete picture of aggregated and interpreted knowledge in an area and evident research gaps. The contribution of review articles can be enhanced through comprehensiveness in the review process, clarity in the methodology adopted, better justifications of motivations and actions as well as the use of information technology in collecting, storing and analysis data. This could lead to more informed legitimisation of choices, transparency and replicability of the review process. How to acquire the technical skills to be confident reviewers continues to problematic. Perhaps seminars and trainings that do not just focus on literature review for empirical research but on literature review as a major research method are crucial in order to improve the confidence in conducting reviews, the number of review articles and their quality. The research combined database search and backward and forward snowballing in order to enhance the validity of findings and exploit the advantages of the two methods through cross checking of the identified studies and being able to identifying the leading scholars as they appeared in both searches. The weaknesses though were that the search and reviewing was tedious. With snowballing the initial selection criteria was dependent on the tittles on the reference list meaning those papers with titles that did not capture the relevant keywords were left, yet it is possible to have articles with titles not so focused but with relevant content and these were ignored. Snowballing also gave rise to the risk of being biased towards specific authors but this was mitigated by the combination with database searches. It was evident from the studies that reviews as a research method have been weakly explored. Practical information on reviews and how to conduct thorough synthesis of literature is scarce. More research is needed in the area especially on the individual types of reviews, their application and when they are appropriate to add on the few available studies.

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