Sample Literature Review Introduction

Read the following sample and identify the key elements of a Literature Review Introduction.

This Literature Review will examine the main issues surrounding the drive for e-Learning environments within the university sector, impediments to the successful implementation of e-Learning, and guidelines that are available to assist academic staff in tackling identified issues. The study within this review of literature focuses on objectives 1 and 2 below (the third objective will be met through the vehicle of empirical data collection and analysis, while the final objective – objective 4 – is derived as a result of the findings from objectives 1, 2 and 3):

1 Identify the forces driving e-Learning and the barriers to the successful delivery of e-Learning programmes.
2 Evaluate critically models and frameworks relevant to supporting academic staff in coping with e-Learning.
3 Explore staff stakeholder views and practices related to e-Learning preparation, including drivers and barriers to e-Learning.
4 Formulate recommendations on staff preparation issues.

By exploring the above areas of literature, a significant contribution will be made to this research. The strategic forces pushing universities to engage e-Learning, together with the benefits to staff and students, will be evaluated.

Similarly, barriers to e-Learning involvement in universities will be examined, such as individual and social barriers, opposition to globalization, inadequate student infrastructures and the need for academic staff support. Importantly, guidelines to support academic staff will be assessed in terms of their relevance to preparing academic staff for e-Learning. In effect, the value of studying the aforementioned literature areas will be to provide a meaningful discussion and analysis of e-Learning, in a structured way, to facilitate a critical understanding of academic staff preparation issues.

At the end of this major section it is hoped that a critical understanding of key issues is exhibited, that the reader will be better informed in these areas and that there will emerge a clear focus, and justification, for empirical research in the field of e-Learning in higher education. In the first instance, a sensible starting point is to investigate what is meant by the term e-Learning. Additionally, the educational phenomenon referred to as distance learning – seen by many as an obvious use of e-Learning – will be explored to help place in context drivers and barriers to e-Learning.

(Adapted from Biggam, 2015)

Sample Literature Review Conclusion

Read the following sample and identify the key elements of a Literature Review Conclusion.

Emerging issues and need for empirical research

The study of relevant e-Learning literature revealed that e-Learning is a complex and moving landscape. To begin with, there is no agreed definition of e-Learning. One was produced, highlighting connectivity, support infrastructures, and flexibility of access and delivery. Similarly, although there were many strategic drivers (perceived reduced costs, access to global markets, increased students, etc.) and potential educational benefits to staff and students (such as: flexibility of delivery and access, independent learning, job opportunities, etc.), there were also many barriers that were identified that could impact on universities and staff contemplating involvement in e-Learning (staff resistance, concerns over student drop-out rates, student inability to cope with independent learning, opposition to globalization, access to support
facilities, inadequate student support infrastructures; and, crucially, lack of staff preparation to cope with e-Learning).

The review of literature stressed the need to have in place an infrastructure to support academic staff (Hara and Kling 1999; Farrell 2001; Ryan 2001). With the emphasis on greater student independence and responsibility in e-Learning, the tutor encounters a pedagogical shift from ‘sage on the stage’ to ‘guide on the side’. To accommodate this new paradigm shift in teaching approach, staff, as well as students, require support mechanisms. The main support mechanism highlighted by research was the provision of training (both pedagogical and skills-based) to prepare staff to meet the needs of students engaging with e-Learning. There was concern that universities may not train their staff, or have available for reference guidelines on how to support their staff in the development and management of e-Learning. Guidelines and Models on e-Learning support infrastructures were reviewed. Meaningful guidelines were identified as a necessary prerequisite to preparing academic staff for e-Learning environments. However, the guidelines and models, although useful in part, tended to concentrate on the needs of students or, where advice on preparing staff for e-Learning was given, were mainly skeletal and general in nature with relatively little advice based on academic staff experiences. That is not to say that useful advice on key skills is not available (e.g. Jones et al. (2004) identify key skills needed by staff preparing for e-Learning, as does Salmon (2000)); but there is a need to understand how staff are being prepared for e-Learning and if they are being trained on the pedagogical skills highlighted in the Literature Review. Also, do staff have an understanding of the benefits of e-Learning and the impediments to successful e-Learning?

A crucial issue for the development of e-Learning in universities is that recommendations on future directions ought to be based on research. There exist various means by which universities keen on preparing staff for e-Learning can obtain guidance and advice: e-Learning websites; consultants; e-Learning courses (at a price); attendance at conferences. However, for meaningful debate and academic credibility, e-Learning guidance and recommendations ought to be based on research findings, using valid and reliable methods of data collection. Unfortunately, empirical data on university approaches to staff training are few and far between; for example, when Britain and Liber (1999: 8) surveyed 100 HE institutions in the UK to determine use of VLEs in these institutions, only 11 responses were returned: ‘too low to warrant detailed analysis of results’. E-Learning is moving slowly and in a piecemeal fashion in the HE sector, with little strategic guidance and direction. The Department for Education and Skills (2003: 25), as a result of a low uptake of e-Learning in Higher Education, urged universities to participate and contribute to the principles of ‘pedagogy and practice for e-Learning’, particularly through a practice-based research environment. In other words, there is a continuing need for empirical data on how academic staff are preparing for e-Learning, and the aforementioned review of literature supports this claim.

To arrive at a deeper understanding of how universities are meeting the challenge of e-Learning, empirical research will be implemented. Specifically, such research will attempt to find out how academic staff are preparing for e-Learning, what motivates them to do so, and, from a wider perspective, the drivers and barriers acting on the university environment in relation to developing e-Learning programmes. The next stage of this research will detail the Research Methods to be used to capture the empirical data, including details on the research strategy to be adopted, data collection techniques, sample selection and management of the researcher’s role.

(Adapted from Biggam, 2015)
Sample Critical Evaluation
Identify the steps that the student takes to provide a persuasive critique.

(a) **Describe** what you are reading (to show that you can interpret what others write).

(b) **Offer** your **views** on what you have read.

(c) **Support** your **views** (i.e. illustrate *critical evaluation*).

……..There are a number of definitions that equate e-Learning with Internet based learning. For example, Rodney Thomas, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of academy Internet, a UK-based company offering e-Learning solutions to Universities and the business community, associates e-Learning with Internet-based learning (2001: 2):

‘Today’s learning communities gather in the virtual space provided by the Internet – communicating at the speed of thought, on a global scale. E-Learning is the most effective, efficient means ever invented for people to get the knowledge they need, at the time when they need it most, wherever they happen to be.’

However, to restrict e-Learning to Internet-based learning could lead to anomalies in deciding what is accepted as e-Learning. For example, if a university has two groups of students studying a module, with one set learning at home through the Internet, and the other set of students learning on-campus, with both sets of students using identical ‘e-Learning’ software, then it would be inconsistent to classify one type of learning as e-Learning, and the other not, just because it is not Internet-based. To underline this point, WebCT’s course authoring software is used over the Internet and on-campus, with 80% of its software used on-campus (Bates 2001), indicating that e-Learning can appear in either pure e-Learning environments and also be part of a traditional teaching and learning setting……

.........................................................................................................................

**Resources**