

IDENTIFYING RESEARCH GAPS

1. What Is a Research Gap?

A research gap is a **question** or a **problem** that **has not been answered** by any of the existing studies or research within your field. It is any space where there's a **lack of solid, agreed-upon research** regarding a specific topic, issue or phenomenon. In other words, there's a **lack of established knowledge** and, consequently, a **need** for further research. Sometimes, a research gap exists when there is a concept or new idea that hasn't been studied at all. Sometimes you'll find a research gap if all the existing research is outdated and in need of new/updated research (studies on Internet use in 2001, for example), or, perhaps a specific population has not been well studied (perhaps there are plenty of studies on teenagers and video games, but not enough studies on children and video games, for example). These are just a few examples, but any research gap you find is an area where more studies and more research need to be conducted.

Let's look at these **hypothetical examples** to illustrate a research gap.

Within the existing research regarding **factors affect job satisfaction**, there may be a wealth of established and agreed-upon empirical work within a **US and UK context**, but very little research within Eastern nations such as **Japan or Korea**. Given that these nations have distinctly **different national cultures and workforce compositions** compared to the West, it's plausible that the factors that contribute toward job satisfaction may also be different. Therefore, a research gap emerges for studies that explore this matter.

As previously noted, **only a few studies** were carried out to examine the structure of Master's dissertations. The focus of these studies was mainly on general problems related to dissertation writing. However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has investigated **the challenges encountered by graduate students in writing the literature review chapter**. Moreover, research on this topic **has not yet been conducted** in the Algerian context. Hence, the aim of this study is to explore the difficulties encountered by Master 2 students of didactics at Blida 2 University in writing the literature review chapter of their dissertations. It also sheds light on the major factors that negatively affect students' success in meeting the requirements of writing a good review of the literature.

2. How to Identify a Research Gap?

1. Identify your broad area of interest.

2. Do an initial literature scan: Search for the keywords that are relevant to your area of interest and select the most recent papers.

3. Review and select articles that interest you (read just titles and abstracts)

4. Skim-read your selected articles: you'll need to pay attention to the following:

- The **abstract**
- The **introduction** – this will give you a bit more detail about the context and background of the study, as well as what the researchers were trying to achieve (their research aims)
- The **discussion** or **conclusion** – this will tell you what the researchers found.

By skimming through these three sections for each research paper, you'll gain a **reasonable idea** of what each study was about, without having to dig into the details. Generally, these sections are usually quite short, so it shouldn't take you too long.

5. Go “FRIN hunting”

FRIN stands for “further research is needed”. The FRIN is where the researchers explain what other researchers could do to build on their study or just on the research area in general. In other words, the FRIN section is where you can find fresh **opportunities for novel research**. Most empirical studies will either have a dedicated FRIN section or paragraph, or they'll refer to the FRIN **toward the very end** of the article. You'll need to do a little scanning, but it's usually pretty easy to spot. Search for **a few very specific phrases**, namely:

- Future research
- Further research
- Research opportunities
- Research directions

3. Types of Research Gaps

➤ The Classic Literature Gap

This type of research gap emerges when there's a **new concept or phenomenon** that hasn't been studied much, or at all. For example, when a social media platform is launched, there's an opportunity to

explore its impacts on users, how it could be manipulated for marketing, its impact on society, and so on. The same applies for new technologies, new modes of communication, transportation, etc.

Classic literature gaps can present **exciting research opportunities**, but a drawback you need to be aware of is that with this type of research gap, you'll be **exploring completely new territory**. This means, there won't be very many existing studies that directly relate to the topic.

➤ **The Disagreement Gap**

The disagreement gap emerges when there are **contrasting or contradictory findings** in the existing research regarding a specific **research question** (or set of questions). Importantly, for this type of research gap, there needs to be a **relatively balanced set of opposing findings**.

➤ **The Contextual Gap**

A contextual gap exists when there's already a covered body of existing research on a particular topic, but an **absence of research in specific contexts**.

For example, there could be a lack of research on:

- A specific **population** – perhaps a certain age group, gender or ethnicity
- A **geographic** area – for example, a city, country or region
- A certain **time period** – perhaps the majority of the studies took place many years or even decades ago and the landscape has changed.

➤ **The Methodological Gap**

This type of research gap emerges as a result of the research methodology or design of existing studies. With this approach, you'd argue that the methodology of existing studies is lacking in some way, or that they're missing a certain perspective.

For example, you might argue that the bulk of the existing research has taken a quantitative approach, and therefore there is a lack of rich insight and texture that a qualitative study could provide.