



Literature Review Synthesis Matrix

A structured tool for comparing studies, tracing evidence and writing a critical review by themes rather than listing authors.

DESIGNED FOR

Researchers reviewing empirical, theoretical and policy literature

How to use this resource

- 1 Define the review question and search boundaries before collecting sources.
- 2 Record comparable information for every source. Separate the authors' findings from your interpretation.
- 3 Group studies by theme, compare agreements and differences, then identify the unresolved gap.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Use this tool to organise, question and improve your own work. It does not replace your institution's guidance, your supervisor's advice or your responsibility as the author.



A

Review scope and search plan

Decide what evidence is relevant before searching

Review question

What specific issue, relationship or experience must the literature explain?

Coverage period

From: To:

Core concepts and synonyms

List keywords, alternative spellings, related terms and local terminology.

Geographical scope

Global / Africa / Tanzania / local setting

Search strings

Combine concepts with AND and alternatives with OR. Record the exact search used.

Sources to search

Databases, repositories, journals and official websites.

Inclusion criteria

Examples: relevant population, context, methods, date range, language, full text.

Exclusion criteria

Examples: unrelated outcomes, unverifiable source, duplicate, opinion without evidence.

Before adding a source

- ☐ I can identify the author, year, title and publication or issuing body.
- ☐ The source directly supports a claim or decision in my study.
- ☐ I have read enough of the source to represent it accurately.
- ☐ I will record a DOI or stable link where available.



B

Source synthesis matrix: entries 1-5

Record evidence in your own words and verify every citation before use

No.	APA citation and stable link	Context, participants and sample	Purpose and theory or concepts	Design, tools and analysis	Key evidence and findings	Limitations or unresolved gap	How it informs my study
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

Tip: add a second sheet when needed; consistent notes make patterns and contradictions easier to see.



B

Source synthesis matrix: entries 6-10

Record evidence in your own words and verify every citation before use

No.	APA citation and stable link	Context, participants and sample	Purpose and theory or concepts	Design, tools and analysis	Key evidence and findings	Limitations or unresolved gap	How it informs my study
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							

Tip: add a second sheet when needed; consistent notes make patterns and contradictions easier to see.



C

From notes to synthesis

Compare evidence before writing the literature review

Theme	Sources	Converging evidence	Differences or contradictions	Tanzania or local relevance	Remaining gap
Theme 1:					
Theme 2:					
Theme 3:					

Synthesis paragraph planner

1. Claim

What does the combined evidence show?

2. Compare

Which studies agree, differ or qualify the claim?

3. Explain

Why might context, sample or method produce differences?

4. Link

What does this mean for your study and gap?

Evidence-based gap statement

State what is known, what remains uncertain, why the uncertainty matters in your context and how your study responds.
