

In the Fall of 2013 for my Psychology Senior Seminar class, I conducted a literature review on the topic of my choice. The research I did for this literature review was done primarily online using indexes and databases. The databases I used included Academic Search Premier, EBSCO MegaFile, ERIC, PsychINFO, and Science Direct. Through the use of these databases, I was able to compile thirty pieces of primary literature. Each detailed the methods and findings of a particular psychological study. In addition to the articles I found online, I also used one Developmental Psychology textbook to gain a further theoretical understand of my topic.

The topic I chose was one that is very important to me personally. I have a sister who is deaf. She has a cochlear implant in each ear, which is a device that is surgically implanted and that is used to artificially produce sound. Observing her development through the use of these devices, especially in language, has therefore been a very big part of my life. Because of this, research on cochlear implants is a topic that I am highly interested in.

For my literature review, I narrowed the scope of my interest in cochlear implants to specifically look at language acquisition. Studies on the use of cochlear implants have shown that there are many factors affecting language learning success, one of which is the age at which the child receives his or her cochlear implant. Research has historically shown that the earlier children are implanted, the better their chances are of successfully acquiring speech. Although this is something I basically grew up knowing, I was interested in examining the psychological basis for this theory and in understanding what other factors also play a role in this interaction.

My strategy for finding pieces of literature through the online databases was to enter search terms that I thought would relate to my topic and then find as many articles as possible. I was careful in thinking of terms that would relate to my project, as I was only interested in language development that was specifically related to the use of a cochlear implant and the age at which the child received his or her device. Search terms I used included cochlear implant, speech development, language acquisition, age at implantation, and speech intelligibility. I tried different combinations of these terms until I found one that would give me the most articles that related directly to my topic of interest.

After I had compiled a large number of articles, I slowly sifted through each article, keeping in mind the purpose of my literature review and the standards set for this project by my professor. As we could choose any topic of psychology to research, there were not very many constraints on our research process. There were, however, guidelines for the quality of the research we looked at as well as for the type of research. The articles we reviewed were first required to detail empirical studies in which quantitative data was found. In addition, the research was required to be fairly recently published.

I chose a cutoff of publication within the last 20 years. I chose a fairly wide range because there are several factors which make research with cochlear implants fairly uncommon. First, there is a controversy among the Deaf community about the use of cochlear implants. Some individuals believe that deaf people should not try to fix the way that they were born and should embrace being deaf and Deaf culture. Because of this, among the already low number of deaf individuals in society, relatively few deaf individuals actually receive cochlear implants. Also, research on cochlear implants is difficult to do because of obvious ethical reasons. Random assignment of treatment simply cannot be done. As a result, valid and reliable research on this topic is not very prevalent.

Other qualifications I took into consideration when selecting sources included an adequate number of participants according to standards for psychological research and the

validity of testing methods. I heavily scrutinized the methods used in each study for apparent soundness of methodology and the validity and reliability of the measures that were used. I also took into account the applicability of the results for my topic of interest.

Overall, I learned a lot about the way psychological research and specifically literature reviews are done through the completion of this project. Although I have done a fair amount of research using online databases in the past, I really gained an appreciation for how they work and how effective research is done using online resources through this project. This assignment also forced me to really dig deep into the psychological literature and to gain a greater understanding for what makes up quality research and what does not.