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Abstract- This paper presents a theoretical study of different research paradigms, the difference between qualitative and quantitative research and interviews as a research methodology.  The purpose is to enrich the philosophical and methodological stances of social science research, which might be suffering from their so called bias for quantitative research methodologies.

Key words- research paradigms, ontology, epistemology, methodology, qualitative research, quantitative research, semi-structured interviews.

**Research paradigms**

Paradigms are defined as the basic set of beliefs (or metaphysics) or even a world view that guides a researcher or investigator, not only in choices of a method, but ontologically and epistemologically in fundamental ways (Guba and Lincoln 1994).  Any researcher has to perforce confront with complex and interdependent relationship between important issues of ethics (axiology), ontology, epistemology and methodology before giving a concrete shape to his or her thesis.  Easton (1995) states that philosophical choices are not made implicitly, or merely by default, but they sit most comfortably with the personal beliefs of the researcher.  The choice and justification of an appropriate research methodology depends on the paradigm or the research tradition in which the researcher locates himself.  Kuhn (1970) who introduced paradigms into social sciences defined it as "the constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by the members of a given community."  Though there has been in the past a contention among various paradigms for legitimacy, intellectual and paradigmatic hegemony (Guba & Lincoln 1994), there has been a growing realisation (Lincoln and Guba 2000), to probe where and how paradigms do exhibit confluence.  Denzin & Lincoln (2002) note that within the past decade, the borders and boundary lines separating the paradigms and perspectives have begun to blur.  This is again as a result of the blurring of the disciplinary boundaries in the social sciences (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).   Patton (2000) points out that there is no definite way to categorise the various philosophical and theoretical perspectives that have influenced and distinguish types of qualitative inquiry.

During 1970s and 1980s concerns were raised about limitations of quantitative data, and methods often associated with positivism, which was then the dominant paradigm. This gave rise to the birth of different research paradigms.  In the positivist version it was contended that there is a

reality out there to be studied, captured, and understood.  The post positivists argue that reality could never be fully apprehended, but only approximated (Guba 1990).  Interpretive research is fundamentally concerned with understanding the meaning of the respondents; and in doing so it seeks to understand social members' definition of a situation (Schwandt 1994).  Constructionists argue that knowledge and truth are the result of perspectives (Schwandt 1994).  Hence all truths are relative to some meaning, context or perspective.  The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativistic ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures (Denzin and Lincoln 2000).  The next paradigm of interest, critical postmodernism, is a combination of two somewhat different worldviews- critical theory and post-modern scholarship.  These researchers argue that positivists' methods are but one way of telling a story about society or the social world.

**Methodology**

Guba and Lincoln (1994) affirm that both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used appropriately with any research paradigm, but the questions of method/s are secondary to questions of paradigm.  Though, both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used appropriately with any research paradigm, the interpretive and critical paradigms are central to qualitative approach (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).  The nature of value free inquiry based on a "God's eye view of reality"- a hall mark of quantitative research- is challenged by qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).[1]

Schwandt (2000, p 189) state that "qualitative inquiry practitioners share a general rejection of the blend of scientism, foundational epistemology, instrumental reasoning, and the philosophical anthropology of disengagement that has marked mainstream social sciences."  According to Yin (1984), qualitative approach helps in addressing the 'why and hows' of an inquiry.  Eisenhardt (1989) emphasizes that qualitative approach can make a significant contribution to theory development when key themes are weakly developed.  According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994,

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[1] According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005, XII), "qualitative researchers locate themselves on the borders between post positivism and post structuralism. They use any and all of the research strategies (case study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, biographical, historical, participatory and clinical)… As interpretive bricoleurs, the members of this group are adept at using all of the methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials… And, as writers and interpreters, these individuals wrestle with positivistic, post positivist, post structural and post modern criteria for evaluating their work.  The qualitative researchers do not believe in the world of "naive realism," where a text does not mirror the world, but creates the world."

p.2), "qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their naturalistic settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials- case study, personal experience, introspective life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives." Not only that, qualitative research is being used by scholars to "move the current generation of critical, interpretive thought and inquiry beyond rage to progressive political action, to theory and method that connects politics, pedagogy, and ethics to action in the world" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p.xi). The word qualitative implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined, or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researches stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational context that shapes inquiry (Denzin &Lincoln 1997). They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. But, Qualitative research though well developed in terms of validity is underdeveloped in terms of reliability (Perakyla 1997, p 216). Reliability, according to Kirk and Miller (1986), is defined as the degree to which the findings are independent of accidental circumstances of the research; where as validity of research concerns the interpretation of observations.

In contrast quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Inquiry is purported to be within a value-free framework (Denzin and Lincoln 1997). Quantitative research methodologies depend largely on tests, rating scales, questionnaires, and physical measures. It could be therefore concluded that while numbers are the end product of quantitative researches, flow diagrams and narrative description of events and process are the end result of qualitative researches (Landy & Conte, 2004; Struss & Corbin, 1990).

There are different types of qualitative methods, which are ethnography/ participant observation, qualitative interviewing, focus groups, discourse and conversation analysis, collection and qualitative analysis of texts and documents (Bryman and Bell 2003). Kvale (1996) discusses several philosophical approaches to qualitative interviews- post-modern thought, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and dialectics.

**Interviews**

Interview participants communicate the practices of their every day life in manners that are recognisable and orderly giving a scope to the development of a reality that is ongoing and achieved through an interpretive accomplishment (Holstein and Gubrium 1997). An interview could be structured, unstructured, or semi-structured (Bryman and Bell 2003). The interviews thus could be flexible, dynamic and also be in-depth. According to Holsten and Gubrium (1997), interviews are a special form of conversation and generate empirical data about social world; they may vary from highly structured, standardised, quantitatively oriented survey interviews to semi-formal guided conversations and free-flowing informational exchanges. The interview researchers, according to Miller and Glassner (1997), however face a great deal of dilemma. This is because positivists nurture a goal to create, through structured interviews ('pure interviews') that is conducted in a 'sterilised context,' a "mirror reflection of the reality" that exits in the social world; while on the other hand, radical social constructionists argue that no knowledge about a reality 'out there' in the social world could be obtained from the interview as the researcher and researched only create "narrative versions of the social world" in a specific context through interaction. These narratives, according to Holstein and Gubrium (1997, p 113), "may be as truncated as forced-choice survey answers or as elaborate as oral life histories," but they are all constructed in situ, as a product of the talk between interview participants." According to Silverman (1993), interviewers in the interactionist tradition construct not just narratives, but social worlds as the purpose is to gain an authentic insight into people's experiences; non positivistic interviews help to achieve an 'inter-subjective depth' and 'deep-mutual understanding' that reflects knowledge of the social world. Kvale (1996) describes an interview as the "favoured digging tool" of social sciences. Further, according to him, the purpose of qualitative research interviews is to understand themes of the lived daily world of the subject as understood and narrated by him. Therefore to succeed in this mission, he says, a qualitative research interview is mostly semi structured- it is neither an open conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire- and it has to be conducted according to an interview guide that focuses on certain themes with some suggested questions. Patton (1990, 2002) differentiating qualitative interviews from quantitative tests associated with questionnaires describes that the purpose of qualitative interviewing is "to understand how program staff and participants view the program, to learn their technology and judgements, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences." According to Bryman and Bell (2003, p216), a researcher will opt for unstructured interviews, if he feels that the "use of even the most rudimentary interview guide will not allow genuine access to the world views of members or a social setting or of people

sharing common attributes;" on the other hand, "if the researcher," they believe, "is beginning to investigate with a fairly clear focus rather than a very general notion of wanting to do research on a topic, semi structured interviews should be his choice." Semi-structured interviews, further, according to Bryman and Bell (2003, 212), "allow the researcher, who has a list of questions, to cover fairly specific topics and the respondent has a great deal of leeway in how to reply." Spender (1989, p.79) notes that a focussed or semi-structured interview juxtaposes "unstructured interviews with loose pattern of agreement with the interviewee about the context of enquiry."

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