Declaring My Ontological and Epistemological Stance: A Reflective Paper.

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ABSTRACT: Undertaking research requires a researcher to foreground their paradigm/worldview in the form of their ontological and epistemological stance. It is important to develop a deeper understanding of the assumptions underpinning a range of educational traditions and their relationships to educational research in general. A researcher may construct knowledge socially as a result of his or her personal experiences in life within their natural settings. Qualitative research seeks to promote a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspectives of the researcher. This challenges the scientific-realist assumption that reality is out there to be discovered. It is unlikely that one will gather 'depth' and 'insight' via the statistics that are frequently used in quantitative methods. This does not go to reduce quantitative research as another way of knowing. This reflective paper seeks to emphasize the importance of education and the nature of knowledge, as well as the central philosophical arguments that shape various paradigms of inquiry.

RÉSUMÉ: Pour entreprendre une recherche, un chercheur doit mettre en avant son paradigme / sa vision du monde sous la forme de sa position ontologique et épistémologique. C'est important de développer une compréhension plus approfondie des suppositions qui sous-tendent un éventail de traditions pédagogiques et de leurs relations avec la recherche pédagogique en général. Un chercheur peut construire des connaissances socialement à la suite de ses expériences personnelles dans la vie dans son environnement naturel. La recherche qualitative vise à promouvoir une compréhension approfondie d'un cadre ou d'une activité sociale du point de vue du chercheur. Cela remet en question l'hypothèse scientifiquement réaliste selon laquelle la réalité est à découvrir. Il est peu probable que l'on recueille la « profondeur » et la «

perspicacité » via les statistiques fréquemment utilisées dans les méthodes quantitatives. Cela ne réduit pas la recherche quantitative comme une autre façon de savoir. Ce document de réflexion cherche à souligner l'importance de l'éducation et la nature des connaissances, ainsi que les principaux arguments philosophiques qui façonnent divers paradigmes d'enquête.

Purpose Statement

This paper will examine the reflections on ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, and methods that emerges in a research project or inquiry by drawing out discussions in and around some debates regarding the ongoing tensions and dialectics around the philosophical assumptions regarding qualitative and quantitative methods. A careful thought process and mind-work was involved to avoid statements that lend itself to reductionism or the trappings about paradigms in a binary in research. Developing a deeper understanding of the assumptions underpinning a range of educational traditions and their relationships to educational research in general is important.

I will begin this reflective paper by foregrounding the work of Dewey (1933), who posits that reflection is an "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 9). As a researcher, it is important to articulate how one comes to know through an informed thought process. I begin by examining some literature surrounding qualitative and quantitative research and the associated paradigms. Next, I expand on my rationale for reflection on my worldview as a qualitative researcher, articulate some arguments on the inherent dangers of falling into the trap of reductionism or a clean binary between qualitative and quantitative research. I conclude by arguing why a researcher seeking a deeper meaning of a complex phenomenon is best suited using an interpretive paradigm to get an in-depth understanding where numbers and statistics cannot fully capture perspectives and experiences.

Literature Review

I will attempt an explication on the contrasting views on qualitative and quantitative research by examining current literature, their positionality and dialectics regarding ontology and epistemology in current educational research.

I begin with Brooke (2013), who posits that the thinking and understanding of the world that influences researcher's actions are reflected in their ontological and epistemological positionality. It will be fair to foreground this with a brief philosophical and historical overview surrounding the conversations around this worldview. There is ongoing tension around research traditions in education that ascribe to the positivist approach that prefers quantitative research and the interpretivist approach that aligns with qualitative methodologies for study. Positivism according to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), traces its roots to the beginning of the nineteenth century, where researchers used checklists of already prepared traits to categorize a society's given evolution. The researchers went into the fields with a-priori beliefs regarding the "other". The etic or outsider perspective was what ruled supreme in the eyes of the positivist researchers of the time. On the other hand, the constructivist tradition is associated with critical thinkers like Max (1818-1883), Nietzsche (1844-1900), Manheim (1893-1947) and Weber (1864-1920). Weber for instance called for "Verstehen" or understanding rather than "Erklaren" or explanation. Brooke (2013) agrees that it mattered to be concerned with the process of the why and the how and not only on the where, the what, the who and the when. The constructivist relies on an insider perspective to understand, knowing that there are differing realities in the world, research thus needs to take account human situations, behaviours, experiences that construct realities which are inherently subjective.

Moving forward, the work of Vasilachis (2011) examined the need for understanding ontological and epistemological undercurrents involved in qualitative research. The author argued against scientific knowledge and how it lends itself to an objective way of knowing in the search for a singular truth. Qualitative offers the broad possibility of other ways of knowing. It is pertinent to point out that scientific or positivistic knowledge is not the only way to know. Vasilachis' (2011), article is biased and leans more to an audience of qualitative researchers which highlights the importance of people, context and what researchers seek to understand in a particular context. An interesting convergence that bubbles to the top is that all researchers want to "know", going about how to know is where the divergence occurs. The positivist looks for a truth and the constructivist seeks to understand and illuminate. Vasilachis (2011) argued for a cognitive interaction and cooperative knowledge production between the researcher and research participants during a qualitative study. In seeking to understand as a qualitative

researcher, the ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological parameters must percolate in any inquiry that is to be put out there.

In the article by Boffa, Moules, Mayan, and Cowie (2013), the authors sought to lay out some of the philosophical traditions and theoretical paradigms behind qualitative research. Though the authors of this paper align with the tradition of the hard sciences, they do acknowledge some similar agreements with the qualitative tradition that argues that human interaction is complex and cannot be generalized or predicted; yet, there is the concept of transferability in human science, which recognizes similarities in human experience. They are quick to acknowledge that although a given context may be impossible to repeat, the lessons learned from one context might transfer to another. A common criticism of qualitative research is its subjectivity as opposed to the quantitative aim of describing objective reality. The authors acknowledge that subjectivity is not the inferior word that the natural sciences may believe it to be, but rather based on theories of social construction, subjectivity is the recognition that a subject observing an object situates the object within an existing context based on previous experience, which arguably exists in all scientific research.

Kamal (2018), attempted to demystify all meaning behind verbose academic language within research paradigms and philosophical foundations in qualitative and quantitative studies. The article was targeted at novice researchers relatively new to the world of qualitative research. The article wove a thread through the researcher's own paradigm of constructivism and the philosophical basis (ontological, epistemological and methodology) of a qualitative study. According to Kamal (2018), the paradigms represent the researcher's beliefs and values about the world, the way they define the world and the way they work within the world. To the positivist, reality is also claimed as objectively given and measurable or objective and quantifiable (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). A piece of history tracing the development of qualitative research drew on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and the works of Egon Guba (1978) that addressed the need for theory building by inductive methods on a social phenomenon and discovery in real- world context devoid of control and manipulation.

The conversations around research paradigms are further unpacked by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), as to know how to use them appropriately in research inquiries. The authors allude to a paradigm as a way of looking or thinking about the world and how

this is used to interpret and analyze data. It is a conceptual lens through which the world is examined. The authors agree that a paradigm consists of epistemology, ontology, axiology and methodology. To understand the epistemological element of your paradigm, one should ask the very important question of how we know what we know? This question is the basis for understanding a phenomenon. Ontology examines one's underlying belief system as a researcher, about the nature of being and existence. It is concerned with the assumptions the researcher makes in order to believe that something makes sense or is real by understanding the very nature or essence of the social phenomenon under investigation. Axiology refers to the right or wrong decisions and ethics of care the researcher brings to the study. Lastly, the authors affirm that the methodology articulates the logic and flow of the systematic processes followed in conducting a research project, so as to gain knowledge about a research problem. A unique feature of the paper by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), is the contribution in terms of clarifying the confusion amongst scholars on the term paradigm in qualitative research. This paper was particularly relevant to me as a researcher because it untangled some of the convoluted language around research paradigms. The authors go further by broaching some topics on the type of paradigms in current research. For the purpose of this paper, I will touch briefly on the positivist and the constructivist/ interpretivist paradigm. Worthy of note is the tracing of the philosophical foundation of the positivist paradigm to the French philosopher, Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857), whose known research methods are scientific method of investigation.

Lee (2012) draws attention to qualitative researchers who adopt constructivism as a worldview to approach their research and the associated tensions related with their ontology and epistemology. The author delves further into the subject of ontology/epistemology and admits that there are occasional blurrification of the boundaries between the two in the sense that there are multiple constructions of reality and knowledge with a relative criteria for evaluating knowledge. Lee (2012) asks some jarring questions as to whether reality is constructed or whether the conception of reality is constructed. He agrees that we may construct different 'appearances' (interpretations) by engaging with the same reality or ontological presupposition which serves as a reference point for our interpretations, but realities are not as many as our interpretations or constructions. Care should be taken not mistake appearance for reality.

The use of philosophical perspectives underpinning a qualitative research is essential. Through an auto-ethnographic narrative by the two authors, McLachlan & Garcia (2015), they invite readers into their conversation on how they explained the meaning of epistemology and ontology in qualitative research. The authors recognized that in any type of research, assumptions about ontology and epistemology are pertinent as to how the social world is viewed and how their assumptions influence their inquiry. Through a lens of critical realism, they sought so make a distinction between our ontological and epistemological understanding of the social world. For them, there is a reality out there that exists independently of our knowledge of it and the only way they can interpret this reality, is through their own subjective conceptual schemas. A unique feature of their paper is the attempt of using interviews to further explain how ontology and epistemology works in qualitative research. Through a distinct understanding of the substantive content under investigation in reality/existence (ontological) and how the interaction with the interviewee generates knowledge (epistemological), they formulated their interviews and data collection with this at the back of their mind. Through interviews, they sought a balance between conversations related to the reality beyond the interview setting – that is, the specific research topic – and also the ways in which respondents experientially locate themselves in relation to this reality through the interaction of the interview setting.

Through a poststructuralist and feminist orientation, McCoy (2012), adds her voice to the literature on ontology and epistemology by refusing the positivist language associated with qualitative research in recent times. The author claims that there is an oversimplification in qualitative research methods which is likely the product of training that does not invite students to question beliefs about the nature of reality/ontology and knowledge/epistemology and the appropriate methods to employ given those beliefs. McCoy (2012), further challenges researchers to trouble and question all foundational things that they assumed were solid, substantial and whole. The author encourages readers to look to the hard science in particular physics and what it used to be in the past. A juxtaposition is made between the hard sciences and qualitative research, where not too long ago physics operated by imagining the universe as a closed and determined system, let alone the fantasy that human beings could intervene to use the law of physics to operate efficiently by utilizing cost/benefit analyses

according to free-market logics. By digging deeper into the epistemological and ontological lead of qualitative research, we might be able to apprehend worlds in new ways and build new ways of living and being.

In trying to throw more light on ontological and epistemological paradigms of research, Khan (2014), highlighted the reasons behind the reasons on the selection of a qualitative approach as opposed to a quantitative approach. Through a qualitative, interpretivist approach the author sought to understand supervisory abuse amongst employees. The author attempted a conceptualization of what a paradigm means in research. He posited that the positivist view of the world is objective where behaviour and cause and effect can be measured, and human activity can be predicted. Whereas, an interpretivist view of the world allows for subjective values, where individuals are understood to form their own reality of the world in different contexts through interactions with others. Individuals are understood to perceive the world differently because of their own experiences and perceptions in different contexts. The author expanded on different types of epistemologies and how the selection of epistemology for a specific research is totally dependent upon the nature and the reality of the research (ontology) by drawing on the work of Guba and Lincoln (1994) who identified two types of epistemologies; one is objectivist epistemology stating that the discovered and known reality is real and factual, and the second is subjectivist epistemology stating that the reality is created and discovered. As a researcher, I align my self with the subjectivist epistemology as a qualitative researcher.

Scotland (2012), examined the philosophical underpinnings or research relating to ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods of the scientific/ positivist, interpretive and critical research paradigms. He stresses the importance of a paradigm and acknowledges that every paradigm is based upon its own ontological and epistemological assumptions and because all assumptions are conjecture, the philosophical underpinnings of each paradigm can never be empirically proven or disproven. Different paradigms inherently contain differing ontological and epistemological views; therefore, they have differing assumptions of reality and knowledge which underpin their research approach. This is reflected in their methodology and method. What knowledge is, and ways of discovering it, are subjective. Regarding educational research, the scientific/ positivist paradigm seeks to generalize, the interpretive paradigm seeks to understand, and the critical paradigm seeks to

emancipate or bring about changes. Each paradigm has its own ways of realizing its aims. Researchers are advised to explicitly state their paradigms in research. It is worth noting that, there is nothing like a perfect paradigm and all of them have their associated shortcomings.

In examining methodological issues involving qualitative and quantitative research, Tuli (2010) was able to extricate and provoke a conversation on how epistemological and ontological issues were immanent in that discussion. The aim of the paper was to enable readers with little or no previous experience and having superficial understanding of different research methodologies to become more informed consumers and producers of research. The writer uses the term purist to describe researchers, the qualitative purist and the quantitative purist. This was an area of concern for me as a budding researcher because I am of the opinion that as a researcher one cannot be an absolute purists. Depending on the type of research and what one wants to know will determine the paradigm to be used. I found the use of the term purist disconcerting and unsettling for me as a researcher. Despite this, the paper was a good attempt to shed some knowledge on quantitative and qualitative research and the associated ontologies and epistemologies. In terms of convergence Neuman (2003) agrees there is an agreement between both positivist and interpretive researchers that human behaviour may be patterned and regular in that positivists see this in terms of the laws of cause and effect whilst interpretivists see such patterns as being created out of evolving meaning systems that people generate as they socially interact with one another.

Delving into a deeper insight into how paradigms work in qualitative research, Wolgemuth, Erdil-Moody, Opsal, Cross, Kaanta, Dickmann and Colomer (2015) used a six multi- case study to understand participants experiences in interviews that differed in orientation, design, methods, participants, and topics. All the cases explored were all different forms of qualitative research. The drawback to this study was that it centred only on qualitative researches and not a comparison with quantitative research. Despite this, it does not in any way minimize the insights shared on different paradigms and its effect on qualitative research. The authors concur that it is taken-for-granted that research design decisions are paradigmatic in the sense that the theory of the research project influences all aspects of research from selecting a research design, choosing methods, thinking about validity criteria, negotiating the ethics of the research study, and writing-up the

results. They used Roulston's (2010) paradigm-driven conceptualization to compare participants' experiences of qualitative interviews, by asking whether and to what extent the participants' experiences appear to differ between interviews of varying orientations, methods, and topics; and the extent to which they could locate their interviews in Roulston's interview orientations. The findings of their study found no differences in participants' articulation of benefits and risks by interview orientation. Rather, they found that greater benefits were conferred to participants in studies in which they reflected on the process, talked about personally difficult experiences, and seemed to have a trusting relationship with the interviewer. They suggested interview researchers attend to areas in the design and conduct of their interviews so as to continue to explore the methodologies and strategies in these areas that may maximize participants' benefits. Despite all the paradigms involved within qualitative research, the relevance for me as a researcher is how qualitative research at the end of the day is about seeking deeper understanding of a phenomenon.

To be pragmatic researchers, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005), asks of researchers to be open minded in the bid to advance knowledge by being circumspect around debates between quantitative and qualitative which tends to be divisive and, hence, counterproductive for advancing the social and behavioural science field. The authors argue that all graduate students should learn to utilize and to appreciate both quantitative and qualitative research. It is not about proving the superiority of one over the other, but rather knowing when and how to use a paradigm in research. The authors expanded on three different schools of thought engaged in the paradigm wars, the purists, situationalists, and the pragmatists. The three camps can be conceptualized as lying on a continuum, with purists and pragmatists lying on opposite ends, and situationalists lying somewhere between purists and pragmatists (Rossman & Wilson 1985). Purists claim they two paradigms are incompatible, the situationalists believe certain research questions can be answered by quantitative, whereas other research questions can only be answered by qualitative questions, and the pragmatist argue that there is a false binary between qualitative and quantitative, but rather the research question should drive the methodology being used because epistemological purity doesn't get research done (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The authors believe that in doing a quantitative research, relevant

decisions regarding selection of parameters and sample are made at some points in the study that introduces some elements of subjectivity into a study, thus the argument that objectivity and subjectivity will lead to a subjective finding which is not totally value free. The purity of a research paradigm is a function of the extent to which the researcher is prepared to conform to its underlying assumptions. If differences exist between quantitative and qualitative researchers, these discrepancies do not stem from different goals but because these two groups of researchers have operationalized their strategies differently for reaching these goals (Dzurec & Abraham,1993). This suggests that methodological pluralism should be promoted. The best way for this to occur is for as many investigators as possible to become pragmatic researchers. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005), agree that pragmatic researchers are more likely to be cognizant of all available research techniques and to select methods with respect to their value for addressing the underlying research questions, rather than with regard to some preconceived biases about which paradigm is on higher hegemonic pedestal in social science research. A researcher well informed in the pragmatics of research will make a better informed decision when broaching a research inquiry.

It is important and fair to compare and contrast qualitative and quantitative methodologies from an ontological and epistemological perspective as a background to my own reflective stance as a researcher. Slevitch (2011), through a careful synthesis and analysis, breaks down the philosophical and meta-theoretical assumptions concerning the nature of reality or existence (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology), the principles regulating investigation (methodology), as well as by techniques or tools regarding the practical implementation of the study (research methods). The author affirms that the relationships among these constructs begins with an ontology which defines epistemology, which in turn defines methodology, which then determines applied methods. In explaining the paradigms further, there is an affirmation that the quantitative approach is a derivative of positivism which relies on the realist orientation that reality exists independently, whilst epistemologically the investigator/researcher and the investigated are independent entities. This bifurcation is why this the epistemological position is also referred to as dualist or objectivist (Smith, 1983). The aim of quantitative research is to establish a truth so as to be able to generalize the outcome. Quantitative researchers believe in large sample sizes to ensure

representativeness and generalizability. On the other hand, qualitative research, stems from interpretivism and constructivism which relies on the idealist orientation that reality is a construct of one's mind. Smith (1983), emphasizes that there is no single reality, but multiple realities based on one's construction or interpretation of reality. The investigator and the investigated subjects or matter are interdependent or interactively connected (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and because reality is constantly being created by cognition or mind, it is fair to say it is influenced by the socio- cultural background, perspectives, and experiences of both the researcher and participants in an inquiry. Personal values are part of the meaning- making process and it is the reason qualitative epistemology is described as subjectivist where facts cannot be separated from values .A noteworthy divergence between the two paradigms is that qualitative methodology does not pursue objectivity and generalizability, because both conditions are viewed as unachievable from ontological and epistemological perspectives. Also, sample size in a qualitative inquiry is not of prime importance. The story or narrative of a single individual will suffice to give an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Seeking to provide an alternative to the notion of generalizability, qualitative methodology emphasizes transferability, the extent to which readers can use/transfer described experiences of the phenomenon to their settings based on the depth and vividness of the descriptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Slevitch (2011), concluded by noting that the ultimate difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches lies in the logic of justification and not in methods, and encouraged researchers to decide which paradigm reflects his or her set of personal beliefs and adhere to that worldview.

The above review of literature summarized some intellectual view on paradigms, the associated tensions, convergence and divergence and how relevant it was in informing my reflective stance on choosing a paradigm as a qualitative researcher.

The Rationale for Reflection

As a researcher, I situate myself as a constructivist- interpretivist. My position is influenced by the works of (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) who claim that reality is socially, culturally and historically constructed. My socio-cultural background growing up in an African environment was influenced by practices, beliefs, values, customs, norms and attitudes that informs my behaviour and outlook on the

world. Large parts of my formal, informal and unconscious learning took place in this environment. My paradigm as a constructivist-interpretivist makes demands of me as a researcher, including the questions I ask and the interpretations I bring to them. My socio-cultural background influences the way I perceive and understand the world. The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology which assumes there are multiple realities, a subjectivist epistemology where the knower and respondent co-create understandings in the natural world through a set of methodological procedures ((Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). There is the understanding that the researcher will construct knowledge socially as a result of his or her personal experiences of the real life within the natural settings investigated (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

The assumption of a relativist ontology means that I believe that the situation I study has multiple realities, and that these realities can be explored and meaning made of them or reconstructed through human interactions between the researcher and the subjects of the research (Chalmers, Manley & Wasserman, 2005). In assuming a naturalist methodology, the researcher utilizes data gathered through interviews, discourses, text messages and reflective sessions, with the researcher acting as a participant observer (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). It is through this lens that I view the world and conduct my research. Thinking along these lines affords my research study methodological congruence (Richards & Morse, 2013) and ushers me into the realm of qualitative research. Qualitative research seeks to promote a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspectives of the research participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). This challenges the scientific- realist assumption that reality is out there to be discovered.

Articulating my ontology and epistemological orientation as a researcher will require that I always ask myself: a) the ontological question: What is there to be known about the form and nature of reality? b) the epistemological question: What is the relationship between the researcher (myself/would be knower) and that which can be known about the reality? and c) the methodological question: How can the I go about attempting to know that which can be known about the reality? (Makombe, 2017). Having this in mind opens the portal into my research and illuminates what I am about to discover and uncover in my research.

According to (Leavy, 2017), ontology is a philosophical belief system about the nature of the social world, whether it is patterned

and predictable or constantly re-created by humans. An ontological belief system informs both our sense of the social world and what we can learn about it and how we can do so. This brings up questions as to whether there is a world out there to be discovered or as social beings we create our own world. It is essentially about the nature of reality. On the other hand, epistemology is a philosophical belief system about how research proceeds and what counts as knowledge (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). It is about what we know and how we claim to know what we know. My ontology as a researcher births my epistemology. My nature and form of my reality informs what I claim to know as a researcher. Both my ontology and epistemology come together to form a paradigm. The term paradigm in educational research or interpretive framework was used by (Guba, 1990, p. 17), as a "basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba,1990, p. 17). Guba believes all research is interpretive that is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Different scholars have postulated several paradigms.

Paul and Elder (1997) discuss two important aspects of paradigms. The first is that paradigms differ in their assumptions about what is real, the nature of the relationship between the one who knows and what is known, and how the knower goes about discovering or constructing knowledge. The second is that paradigms shape, constrain, and enable all aspects of educational inquiry. As further espoused by (Scotland, 2012), a paradigm contains differing ontological and epistemological views on differing assumptions of reality and knowledge which underpins any research. Methodology and methods do form part of the paradigm as well. Methodology is the different ways of undertaking a qualitative research. Some examples of qualitative methodologies include, narrative inquiry, ethnography and case studies, phenomenology, hermeneutics among others. Methods are ways in which data are collected. Some key examples are interviews and observation.

Ontology as a branch of philosophy is concerned with the assumptions we make in order to believe that something makes sense or is real, or the very nature or essence of the social phenomenon we are investigating (Scotland, 2012). It asks very pertinent questions such as: Is there reality out there in the social world or is it a construction, created by one's own mind? What is the nature of reality? In other words, Is reality of an objective nature, or the result of individual cognition? What is the nature of the

situation being studied? (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). I am of the view that reality is a result of individual cognition. Two people growing up in similar circumstances will have different interpretations of their realities which means that the particular way in which an individual construct his or her social reality is contingent on that individual's feelings and general understanding of himself or herself in that environment. Differences in cognition between people reflects differences in decision making and interactive histories (Greifeneder, Bless, & Fielder, 2017).

Ontology as philosophy enables me to examine my underlying belief system and philosophical assumptions I bring to my research about the nature of being, existence and reality. Epistemology, on the other hand focuses on how we come to know. Knowing manifests in various shapes and forms ranging from what we know from experience, watching others, what we learn in school to what we read from books. Flowing from the above ontology, epistemology is about how we claim to know our reality. Similar questions arise when we locate epistemology as a philosophy: Is knowledge something that can be acquired on the one hand, or, is it something that has to be personally experienced? What is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the would-be known? What is the relationship between me, as the inquirer, and what is known? These questions are important because they help the researcher to position themselves in the research context so that they can discover what else is new, given what is known (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The aim of a qualitative researcher is to know and understand. My ontological and epistemological stance that form the assumptions I bring to my research and position as a researcher will not be complete without addressing the values and ethics I bring to research. This opens the door to the question of axiology. Axiology refers to the ethical issues that need to be considered when planning a research proposal. It considers the philosophical approach to making decisions of value or the right decisions (Finnis, 1980). As a researcher, who will always be dealing with human participants, I am bound by duty to act ethically before, during and after my research. Creswell (2014) addresses several ethical issues that can arise prior to a study and how to mitigate them. Disclosing the purpose of the research to all participants, avoid deceiving participants and making them aware of how data will be used is important to my study. Even selecting interview locations is paramount to ensuring participants' comfort, so that no power issues will arise. In reporting, sharing, and storing data, I

will endeavor to avoid disclosing information that would harm participants by using composite stories so that individuals cannot be identified. Confidentiality and anonymity is paramount to protecting my participants.

In undertaking a qualitative research from a constructivist-interpretivist perspective, Morgan (2007) posits some characteristics of research located within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. Among them are the admission that that realities are multiple and socially constructed, the acceptance that there is inevitable interaction between the researcher and his or her research participants and the acceptance that context is vital for knowledge and knowing. The belief that knowledge is created by the findings, can be value laden and the values need to be made explicit. As a researcher, all my biases should be acknowledged and made explicit in my work. In a situation like this, a constructivist-interpretivist epistemology would be employed because it anchors the fact that meaning or knowledge is not there to be discovered but individually or socially constructed. This paradigm tells us that people make their own reality by the meanings and interpretations they give to their experiences and that there are multiple truths. In essence reality is a result of our own making (Furlong, 2013). This is position I align with as a researcher.

Despite all the justification for the interpretivist paradigm, a host of criticisms have been labelled against the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. Pratt (2009) says there is no accepted "boilerplate" for writing up qualitative research. So, in practice, there are still strong critiques concerning the rigor of qualitative research. They argue that while it is undeniable that our understanding of the actions of our fellow-beings necessarily requires knowledge of their intentions, this, surely, cannot be said to constitute the purpose of a social science (Cohen et al, 2018). Knowledge produced by the interpretive paradigm has limited transferability as it is usually fragmented and not unified into a coherent body. Generalizations which are deemed useful to policy makers are often absent because research usually produces highly contextualized qualitative data, and interpretations of this data involve subjective individual constructions (Scotland 2012). Some policy makers frown upon the results from qualitative research. Notwithstanding the critiques, the constructivist- interpretivist paradigm often leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the situation (Morehouse, 2011) being researched. It allows the voices and experiences of participants to be heard through their

perspective. Without such a paradigm through qualitative research some voices will be lost.

Justifying the quality of a constructive-interpretive qualitative research it is appropriate according to Sandberg's (2005) criteria, that the conception of truth as "intentional fulfillment" holds in interpretivism. Intentional fulfillment means that there is agreement between the researcher's interpretation of the phenomenon being studied, and the meaning given by research participants in lived experience. Sandberg (2005) views intentional fulfillment as a "truth constellation" that comprises various aspects that complement each other. The principle of coherence is based upon the hermeneutic circle and requires implementing an iterative process where conflicting interpretations can be judged with respect to how coherent they are with the empirical material. (Avenier & Thomas, 2015). The hermeneutic circle principle acknowledges that all human understanding is achieved by iterating between considering the interdependent meaning of parts and the whole that they form.

Avoiding Reductionism

As pointed out by (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018), there is a philosophical basis of interpreting social reality on two different ends of a spectrum. This is realism and idealism. Realism says the world is out there and it is knowable as it really is. This is an objectivist position. On the other end of the spectrum, is the world of idealism, where the world exists, but different people construe it in different ways. This is a subjectivist view of the world. It is about how the world is constructed and interpreted. Despite the position as espoused by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), utmost caution should be considered in reducing realism and idealism as a binary. It is more complex than seeing realism and idealism as a black and white concept. There a shades of grey. These are where the tensions and politics of the binary reside. None is intrinsically superior to the other, it is wiser to think of qualitative and quantitative research design as complementary parts for the search for knowledge (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). A choice of either quantitative or qualitative is dependent on what one is trying to find out, typically determined by the research question.

Conclusion

My reflections on worldviews has been broadened to emphasize the importance of education and the nature of knowledge, as well as the central philosophical arguments that shape various paradigms of inquiry. Of equal importance is attention to the ethics and historical and social contexts of research and the various forces that shape research goals and practices (Paul & Marfo, 2001). Through my constructivist- interpretivist lens I make meaning and understand the world better as a researcher. This paper has allowed me to further explore my paradigm in terms of ontology, that is my assumptions about the nature of being or reality, my epistemology that is my assumptions about the nature of knowledge and knowing, as well as my methodology that is my approach to problem solving and inquiry strategy.

Hence, in educational research, if a scholar seeks understandings and experiences of a group of students or teachers, qualitative methods are likely to be the best-suited methods. In the interpretive paradigm, the crucial purposes of researchers are to get 'insight' and 'in-depth' information. In that case, using quantitative research, which describes the world in numbers and measures instead of words, is not likely to be productive (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). It is unlikely that I will gather 'depth' and 'insight' via the statistics that are frequently used in quantitative methods. In addition, one of the reasons why qualitative data is rich and in-depth is that researchers often capture data through the process of 'deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding' (Punch & Oancea, 2014) of their participants.

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