



Relationship between Philosophy and Qualitative Methodology in Geographic Research

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Abstract

The term "research philosophy" refers to a comprehensive system of interconnected activity and thought that defines the nature of inquiry through three dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Qualitative research can help anyone understand the complexities of a particular scenario and its significance. This article highlights the relationship between philosophy and qualitative methodology and reviewing the application of qualitative methods in geographic research. Qualitative research has the advantage that the modes of inquiry are inclusive and contextual, and may be used as a guiding principle for future study. From basic ontology to research methodologies, method is a concrete set of stages in a research process. This article concludes by arguing that, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and photo-elicitation interviews are the major application of qualitative methods in geographic research.

Keywords: Philosophy, qualitative, positivism, interpretivism, observation, photo-

1. Introduction

Qualitative methods are gaining popularity in the field of geography. Nonetheless, unlike quantitative approaches, there has been little discussion of the research process in which geographers contribute. This is somewhat unexpected given that the researchers seek to be less authorial, authoritative, and authoritarian by employing qualitative methodologies (Steven, 1991).

The researcher is assumed to be an important component of the research process in qualitative research. A qualitative researcher should offer an overview of his or her individual and career viewpoints and assumptions before commencing a study (Michelle, 2001). At the very least, the study reviewer should be aware of the

researcher's gender, social status, and culture. Such elements influence the qualitative researcher's approach to a particular topic.

The capability of qualitative research to generate rich description of how individuals perceive a specific study topic is its strength. It informs on the “human” aspect of a topic, i.e., the frequently contradictory behaviors, beliefs, views, feelings, and relationships of individuals. Qualitative techniques are also useful for detecting intangible elements such as societal norms, socioeconomic position, gender roles, race, and religion, the significance of which in the study topic may not be explicit. When combined with quantitative approaches, qualitative research may assist us in interpreting and better understanding the complicated reality of a given situation as well as the implications of quantitative data. The main objectives of the assignment are: highlight the relationship between philosophy and qualitative methodology and reviewing the application of qualitative method in geographic research.

2. Methods

To obtain above mentioned objectives of this study, secondary data is used. In this context, different books, research journals, articles and collection materials are considered for discussions and analysis. The critical review of existing data not only discuss the relationship between the philosophical aspect and methodology of research but also can assist to develop the portfolio of various tools that are used for qualitative approach.

3. Discussion

3.1 Research philosophy

The research philosophy is an essential component of the research. A research aspect is a multi-dimensional system of interconnected practice and thought that explains the nature of research along these three dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Johnson et.al, 2004). Ontology is the study of 'to be,' and it is involved with 'what is' the nature of existence and the system of belief as a whole, or what is understood about the world. To put it another way, ontology is a field of philosophy concerned with describing the nature and organization of the universe. It defines the shape and nature of reality, as well as what can be learned about it. The Sage online dictionary of Social Research Methods (2006) defines ontology as “a concept concerned with the existence of, and the relationship between different aspects of society such as social actors, cultural norms and social structure. Ontological issues are concerned with questions pertaining to the kinds of things that exist within society”.

Objectivism and subjectivism are used to categorize ontology. Objectivism refers to the perspective that social objects have on reality as it exists outside of social actors. Subjectivism is related to the social phenomena that arise from the perspectives and effects of the social actors who are involved in their existence. Epistemology is the study of acceptable knowledge in a certain field of study. Richards (2003) defines epistemology as "the assumptions we make about the sort or character of knowledge or how it is possible to learn about the world." In other words, epistemology describes the nature of the research study connection and the nature of human knowledge or understanding that may be gained via various forms of inquiry and other techniques of study. In terms of research philosophy, epistemology may be split into two categories: positivist and interpretivist. In the field of study philosophy, epistemology is divided into three categories: Positivism, Realism, and Interpretivism.

As the study is based on observable social entities, positivism reflects the philosophical approach of a natural scientist. Data gathering and hypothesis formulation are the foundations of the research strategy. These hypotheses will be investigated and validated, and the results will be used in future studies. Human behavior is viewed as passive, regulated, and dictated by the external conditions in positivism. Another aspect of this philosophy is that in order to facilitate the hypothesis, the positivist researcher uses a highly organized approach. Additionally, positivism is based on measurable observations, which leads to statistical analysis.

Interpretivism is a discipline of epistemology concerned with assessing the distinctions between people as social agents. According to interpretive scholars, reality is made up of people's subjective perception of the outside world. As a result, individuals may embrace an inter-subjective epistemology in which they believe reality is socially created. (Kvale, 1995) defines interpretivists as anti-foundationalists who claim there is no single proper path or approach to knowing. He also claims that there are no 'correct' or 'incorrect' testable theories in the interpretative tradition. Instead, they should be evaluated based on how 'interesting' they are to the researcher as well as people working in similar fields.

3.2 Qualitative research method

Qualitative methods revolve around describe, understand, and explaining social phenomena, quantitative methods are more on to explain, predict, and verify (Subedi, 2009). It is the collecting of knowledge about human behavior and perception that constitutes qualitative research. A deeper focus on understanding why and how events occur has become a significant tool in this larger approach to

applied research, mostly because it provides vital insights into the local views of studied populations.

Methods for collecting qualitative data are important for evaluating effects. It gives information that may be used to better understand the processes that lead to measured data and to assess changes in people's perceptions of their own well-being. Furthermore, qualitative studies can be utilized to improve the quality of quantitative judgments based on surveys. It aids in the generation of evaluative hypotheses, the improvement of survey questionnaire design, and the expansion of the types of data used. The researcher must completely, correctly, and deliberately capture any potentially useful data using field notes, drawings, audiotapes, photos, and other appropriate techniques. The techniques used to collect data must adhere to research ethics guidelines. The most frequent qualitative approaches employed in assessment may be divided into two categories: clarifying quantitative evaluation findings. These techniques are distinguished by the following characteristics: Researchers may change the data collection strategy by adding, refining, or dropping techniques or informants.

- They rely more heavily on interactive interviews; respondents may be interviewed several times to follow up on a particular issue, clarify concepts, or check the reliability of data.
- Researchers rely on multiple data collection methods to check the authenticity of their results.
- Generally, their findings are not generalizable to any specific population; rather each case study produces a single piece of evidence that can be used to seek general patterns among different studies of the same issue.

3.3 Relationship between philosophy and qualitative methodology

Qualitative research methodologies should be consistent with a knowledge philosophy. Epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge. Epistemology holds that there is a distinction between knowing and being. Ontology is a comprehensive philosophy that holds that knowledge cannot be separated from living experience. Philosophers have many ideas on what makes knowledge. A researcher must match his or her own viewpoint with a philosophy that will support the study's assumptions. Methodology, as a specific sequence of research stages, may thus be viewed of as being infused with a guiding philosophy.

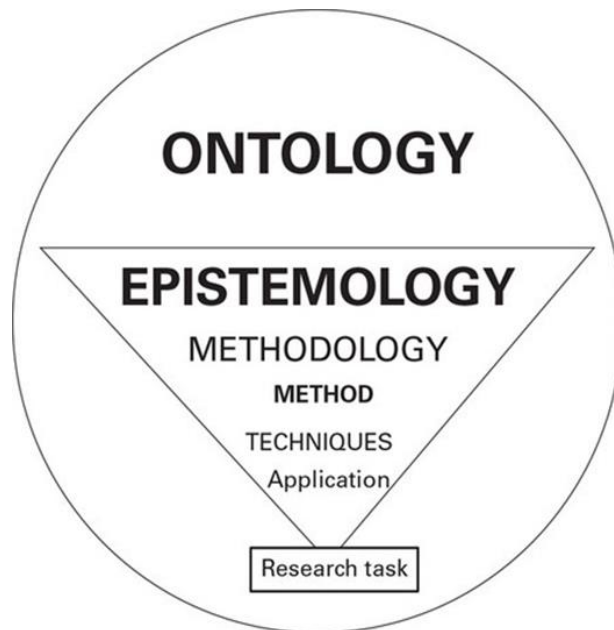


Fig. 1: The epistemological funnel represents research work – from basic ontology to practical research techniques (Source: Lofgren 1996, Figure 1.1)

4. Application of qualitative methods in geographic research

The methodology is an important component of our dissertation or thesis. The methodology outlines the general philosophical underpinnings of the researcher's selected research methodologies, such as whether you are employing qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of both, and why. The intellectual underpinning for all of the research techniques that you have chosen should be obvious to the researcher.

The technique should be related back to the literature to clarify why we are employing specific methodologies and the academic foundation for our selection. If we are writing as a single thesis, the methodology should describe what we accomplished, as well as any changes we made as our work proceeded. Again, it should include a clear academic rationale for all of the decisions we took, as well as references to the literature.

When investigating scientific issues, there are various research methods that may be utilized; we should debate which are the most suited for our research. In social science, the following research methodologies are widely used:

- In-depth interview
- Participant observation
- Photo-elicitation interview

4.1 In-depth interview

In-depth interviews are a valuable qualitative collecting data method that may be utilized for a number of objectives such as needs analysis, program refining, problem identification, and strategy planning. Interviews are the most suited for scenarios in which you want to offer openended questions that extract a wealth of information from a small number of individuals, as opposed to surveys, which are more quantitative and include a greater number of people.

The qualitative methodology emphasizes the unstructured interview. There are four types of interviewing namely informal, unstructured, semi-structured, and structured. (Subedi, 2009). The idea behind the qualitative methodology is to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms and at their own pace (Bernard, 1995).

4.2 Participant observation

Participant observation is one of the most frequent ways for gathering qualitative data, but it is also one of the most challenging. It necessitates that the researcher engage himself or herself in the culture or situation being studied. Participant observation frequently involves months or even years of hard effort since the researcher must become recognized as a natural member of the culture in order to ensure that the insights are of natural phenomena.

Feeling comfortable with the informant is a major aspect of participant observation. People do not always feel comfortable sharing their information with strangers. Thus, as a researcher, one must make the informants feel comfortable to share their information with the researcher. Otherwise, information may be collected but it may not be authentic (Subedi, 2009). The main idea behind participant observation is to collect 'real' information by creating environments where people forget the researcher's presence and continue their lifestyle as usual with the researcher become a participant.

Comparison of two qualitative methods

	In-depth interviews	Observation
Objective	- Perception, opinion, and experience of an individual must be identified.	- Examining how people behave and react in various contexts
Research instrument	- Interview guide	- Observation guide
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acquire detailed information - Recognize individual story - Useful for sensitive issues - Determine the context of the participants' life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nonintrusive - A richness of contextual information - Facilitates data from other sources - Recognize people's real behavior - Act in a variety of scenarios
Dis-advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No contact or input from others - Only own perceptions - Multiple interviews were required to identify a variety of concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Observation interpretation may be subjective - A differentiation between participation and observation is required.

As part of primary data collection, both in-depth interviews and participant observation are important tools for qualitative approach. While in-depth interviews certainly help to obtain fundamental information, on the other hand, observation method can actually identify the behavior of people. The pros and cons of both techniques are not contrary rather it is compliment. Since Ph.D. research itself is a comprehensive study, using multiple approaches would surely help to investigate the situation in depth level.

4.3 Photo-elicitation interview

The photo-elicitation interview technique is also quite interesting of in-depth interview method (Analia, 2010). Researcher's can use photographs in this method to expand on questions, and participants can use photographs to provide a unique way of communicating dimensions of their lives and help them for deeper exploration of the phenomenon under study, such as the possibility of closing communication effect between researcher and participant (Rajendran, 2014).

5. Conclusion

Qualitative research can take numerous forms, such as in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and so on. These research methodologies are inextricably linked to philosophical viewpoints. The advantages of qualitative research is that the techniques of inquiry are comprehensive and contextual, allowing for the discovery of the problem's root cause and overall experience. When analyzing qualitative research reports, it's critical to look at the methodology and also the technique to see whether they align with the researcher's knowledge philosophy. These approaches should be used address the research questions and setting philosophy.

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