

## **UNDERSTANDING OF DOING RESEARCH AND ITS GUIDELINES TO DO A GOOD RESEARCH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Research has well-known as an effective tool to reveal the nature of phenomena and events that occurs around human beings and their environment. A group of experts or well-known as researchers with their curiosity manner always lead them to question why a certain kind of phenomena or event occurs around human beings. For example, researchers curiously question why some students bully other students or why these students are bullied at schools. These questions lead these researchers to investigate these bullying phenomena at schools. It seems that research is about to investigate a certain issue in order to find the answer and the truth as well and why the issue emerged. However, this kind of explanation about research is not yet clear. It is thus very important to have a good understanding of doing a research such as assumptions, paradigms, ideology and methods of research itself. This article discusses the understanding of doing research and its guidelines to do a good research.

Keywords: research assumptions, paradigm, ideology, methods

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian telah dikenal sebagai alat yang efektif untuk mengungkap sifat fenomena dan peristiwa yang terjadi di sekitar manusia dan lingkungannya. Sekelompok ahli atau yang dikenal sebagai peneliti dengan rasa ingin tahu mereka selalu membuat mereka mempertanyakan mengapa suatu fenomena atau peristiwa tertentu terjadi di sekitar manusia. Sebagai contoh, para peneliti dengan penuh tanda tanya mempertanyakan mengapa beberapa siswa melakukan perundungan terhadap siswa lain atau mengapa siswa-siswi yang lain diintimidasi di sekolah. Pertanyaan-pertanyaan ini mengarahkan para peneliti untuk menyelidiki fenomena intimidasi ini di sekolah. Tampaknya penelitian akan menyelidiki masalah tertentu untuk menemukan jawaban dan kebenaran juga dan mengapa masalah itu muncul. Namun, penjelasan semacam ini tentang penelitian belum jelas. Karena itu, sangat penting untuk memiliki pemahaman yang baik dalam melakukan penelitian seperti asumsi, paradigma, ideologi, dan metode penelitian itu sendiri. Artikel ini akan mendiskusikan pengertian melakukan suatu penelitian dan pedoman-pedoman untuk melakukan suatu penelitian yang baik.

Kata kunci: asumsi penelitian, paradigma, ideologi, metode

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **What is research?**

Some theorists such as Borg (1963) as cited in Cohen, Manion, Morrison(2008) stated research is a combination of both experience and reasoning as ‘the most successful approach to the discovery of truth’ (p. 7). One of the limitations with this definition is that it does not explain the process of the research itself. Therefore, Clough & Nutbrown (2007) pointed out that research is not merely to prove things in order to reveal the truth-but it is more about investigating questions, exploring issues and reflecting on what emerges. They further continued that research is also ‘a moral act’ in which the researcher ‘holds responsibility for ensuring that resulting change is for the better’ (p.5). Similarly, Yale (2004) defined that a research is not only how to do it systematically but also convincingly and impressively in its design and creatively in its methods. It seems that Yale emphasized the importance of procedure and mechanism of research. From these three definitions, it is thought that research is a process to discover the truth scientifically in systematic and use convincing methods with intention to change or improve for something better in social reality.

According to Cohen, et.al. (2008) social reality directly deals with the human behavior and its interaction and how each individual is different from 'inanimate natural phenomena' and, indeed, from each other (p.7). In other words, every individual has different ways of interpreting and reacting to the social reality as each of them has different perspective on it. This perspective is often identified as a paradigm. It is thus paradigm is how to view and interpret the world (social reality) through the eyes of different individuals that guides them into action (Cohen, et.al. 2008 & Sikes, 2004). Therefore, researchers must have clear understanding of the paradigm.

#### **Four assumption of research**

In order to generate and have understanding of paradigm, Cohen (2008) suggested four set of assumptions:

1. Ontological kind concerns the nature or essence of social reality that is being investigated objectively. Therefore, the explanation of the investigation in reality based on the facts.
2. Epistemological kind concerns the very bases of knowledge, its nature and form, and how this knowledge can be acquired and communicated to other human beings. In other words, the researcher put his/her position whether to see the knowledge either in subjective or objective way.
3. Human nature kind concerns the relationship between human beings and their world. As the human being is both subject and object of a research, then, it portrays the human as a product of the environment or a creator to produce his/her own environment.
4. Methodology kind concerns the identification of relationship between human beings and their world. The identification is characterized by methods e.g. observation, measurement, experiment and the like.

These four assumptions, ontological, epistemological, human nature and methodology are used to underpin the paradigm

#### **The paradigm of research**

First of all, every researcher needs paradigm before doing a piece of research. Some people believe that as long as a researcher follows the rules of research, such as, putting the research questions, review literature, methodology, and so on, then, everything will be fine. However, this way of thinking is misleading as paradigm is very important for a researcher. Paradigm can lead and guide a researcher how to see or view the world or "something" that a researcher is going to investigate (Cohen, 2008). In other words, paradigm becomes a sharp lens to explore a certain issue. For example, paradigm can help a researcher to learn and understand the situation and phenomena in a society and the researcher has the passion to uncover, interrogate, identify, confront or change the phenomena in a society (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Paradigm can also generate a researcher's ability to have more understanding of reconstruction of knowledge as the result of interaction between the researcher's personal experiences and ideas (Wright, 2007). Paradigm also can help the researcher to discover, internalize, incorporate and construct more informed and sophisticated reconstruction of knowledgeable-based experiences. Moreover, it is possible of the collaboration of many paradigms. This collaboration can help to transform the researcher's intellectual ability, self-empowerment and multi-voice reconstruction so that the researcher is able to bring significantly change including catalyst for action in the society.

There are so many paradigms in social research e.g. education such as positivist, interpretivist, pragmatist, constructivist, constructionist and just to name a few. However, because of its significance for social sciences and its importance for educational research, it is much devoted for discussion to three kinds of paradigms, that is, positivist, interpretivist and critical theory.

1. Positivist paradigm is an approach to view the social reality and treat it like the ‘world of natural phenomena as being hard, real, external’ and objective in reality ‘together with an allegiance to the methods of natural science’ (Cohen et.al. p.7-8, 2008). In other words, this approach helps knower (human) to view and investigate the social reality as the way it is. Another thing, it prevents human contamination from using its knowledge comprehension to intervene the objectivity in reality (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). It is thus the knowledge should be genuine and true. The genuine and true knowledge is primarily based on sense experience and restricted to the objects and can be expanded only by means of observation, survey, experiment and the like (Cohen, et.al, 2008 & Lather, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1989, as cited in Guba & Lincoln, 2005 ).It is thought, however, that it is rather difficult for human to view and interpret the social world objectively without being subjective bias. But, it is assumed that so long as the methodology is followed strictly, objectivity can be reached (Johnson, 2008).
2. Unlike positivist, interpretivist paradigm is an approach to view and interpret the social reality of being much softer, personal, unique and subjective in reality in which ‘imposes on researchers an involvement with their subjects and a rejection of the ways of natural science’ (Cohen et.al., p. 7, 2008). It can be said the human being as a subject can use his/her knowledge to investigate and interpret issues in social reality in order to construct and, at the end, add new knowledge in reality. In addition, there is no single but many truths in social reality and therefore can be claimed, negotiated and multiplied among the individuals (Lather, 2006 & Johnson, 2008). The many truths can be found by means of observation, interpretation and analysis of existing text (Laher, 2006).
3. Critical theory is an approach to view the phenomena of social reality and its behaviour and the need to transform the social reality if there is an inappropriate behaviour (Fay,1987., & Morrison,1995a., as cited in Cohen, 2008). Cohen further continued that the main purpose of this critical theory is not only to understand and accept the situations and phenomena in social reality but also question and transform them. For example, it helps to transform the society and individuals from powerlessness, inequality, poverty, injustice and the like. In addition, critical theory is subjective reality in which it is constructed on the basis of socio-political power with many truths (Laher, 2006). According Guba & Lincoln (2005) ‘critical theorists tend to locate the foundation of truth in specific historical, economic, racial, and social infrastructures of oppression, injustice and marginalization’ (p.204). Another thing, Cohen (2008) highlighted the substantive agenda of critical theory and critical educational theory is how the schools and the society can collaborate together to reduce inequality, poverty, discrimination and other social issues. For example, the schools through their curriculum can promote and teach against inequality or discrimination. The truths can be found by means of observation, interview, dialogue and the like (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

### **Theory of research**

After having a clear and understanding of paradigm, researchers need to design the theory as conceptual thoughts. According to Ball (2006)&Suppes (1978) as cited in Wright (2007); Cohen, et.al., (2008) theory is a conceptual and constructive framework that consists of the outcome of previous empirical work or knowledge in which it becomes a sharp lens to view or investigate a certain issue and to make sense the data. It can be seen that theory has a very significant effect to the whole process of doing a good quality educational research. Wright (2007) claimed that 'the quality of educational research rests in large part in its capacity to engage theory' (p.2). Wright further highlighted that 'we cannot do research without theory; theory shapes how we identify a research problem and then how we frame the research that will address it, whether the research is action research, self-study, an evaluation or an intervention, an ethnography or narrative inquiry, or a poststructuralist genealogy' (p.2).

In addition, theory shapes the observation in the social reality either consciously or unconsciously in which the 'theory highlights or erases what might be observed' (p.9). As the observation shapes the theory, it seems that the observation is the only way to shape the theory. One question needs to be asked, however, is whether there is another way to shape the theory. Cohen suggested the need to consider human experiences and behaviour as it 'advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by the external, objective and physically described reality' (p.22). As the observation, experience and behaviour shape the theory, Cohen further continued, the researchers can work directly with their experience and understanding to develop and design the theory. In other words, their experience and understanding continuously form a set of ideas. A set of ideas that the researchers developed will become their ideology (Cohen, 2008).

### **Ideology of research**

According to Cohen (2008) ideology is a very powerful tool of an individual or a group of individuals to promote and legitimize their particular interest either to change or adhere a certain idea to the especially disempowered groups. Ideology is exposed to all aspect of social reality including education. In the world of education, 'the ideology exposes the operation of ideology in many spheres of education' (p.28). It is thus very important for those who are interested to get involved in educational research to have ideology as their basis for their theory. In other words, a deep understanding of the ideology helps the researchers to make a good and quality research. If the researchers, for instance, want to do a research about bullying at schools, the researchers probably choose critical theory perspective as it shows how teachers, students and parents as well can do collaboration to end the bullying. Another thing, the researchers probably use interpretivist perspective as it investigates what make those students do bullying, or may use psychological theory to learn from psychological perspective as it investigates why the students do bullying at schools.

In addition, Habermas (1972) as cited in Cohen (2008, p.28-29) suggested that ideology through reflective practice can be addressed in four stages:

1. Stage 1: a description and interpretation of the existing situation- an exercise to identify and attempts to make sense of the current situation.
2. Stage 2: a penetration of the reasons that brought the existing situation –purposes of the situation and an evaluation of their legitimacy, involving an analysis of interest and ideologies at work in a situation, their power and legitimacy.

3. Stage 3: an agenda for altering the situation-in order for moves to egalitarian society to be furthered.
4. Stage 4: an evaluation of the achievement of the situation in practice.

After having the theory, methods are needed to design and collect the data. Methods are techniques or procedures used in the process of gathering or collecting data in research (Cohen, 2008) & (Harding, 1987). There are so many techniques or procedures in gathering the data such as participant observation, statistical approaches, measurement experimental studies, role-playing and the like. Some theorist, such as Cohen (2008) classified the techniques of gathering data in social science into two model paradigm, that is, positivist model- 'predetermined questions, recording measurement, describing phenomena and performing experiments' (p.47) and interpretivist model- 'participant observation, role-playing, non-directive interviewing, episodes and accounts' (p.47). While the former model is objective and uses quantitative as its method, the latter is subjective and uses qualitative as its method.

### **Research question**

Defining a clear research question is very important even crucial as it can help to focus on investigation, set boundaries and provide direction in a research. A clear research question will help a researcher to select the theory and literature to be explored and reviewed, to decide the methods, and to choose the form of how to gather the data. A good research question should be generative, clear, distinct, and deep. In order to genuinely explore something or a certain issue (Cohen, 2008). It is therefore important if a researcher starts with basic interrogative words, such as, 'What....?; How...?; or Whether and if...? because these interrogative words will guide a researcher to clarify the research he or she is doing and, importantly, it will keep the researcher on the right track during the research study. Moreover, the use of "To what extent...?" can also help to answer for a subtle reading in order to gain useful insights of the research study. It needs to consider that the guidelines questions below are really important to help a researcher to think whether the research question is well-formed or not (Gough, 2002). These questions are:

1. Is the research question right?
2. Is the research question right for the field?
3. Is the research question well articulated?
4. Is the research question doable?
5. Does the research question get the thick of approval from those in the know (supervisor)?

By questioning these questions, It will help a researcchr to articulate well-formed research questions

### **Methods and methodology of research**

In terms of social science inquiry, Harding stated that evidence-gathering techniques fall into three categories: 'listening to (or interrogating) informant, observing behaviour, or examining historical traces and records' (p.2). For example, when a researcher does a research how to empower poor people, the researcher interview and listen carefully to the villagers, observe their behaviour, way of life and interaction among them and probably investigate or examine their past life. From this example, the researcher uses interview and observation as his/her method to collect the data. It seems

that there is a gap between the researcher and the participants, say, separate the researcher from the participants.

Clough and Nutbrown (2007) stated clearly that ‘the job of method is only to *hold apart* the researcher and her object....methods do not tell us what the thing is; they do not even describe it...all they tell us is the circumstances under which the researcher met the object’ (p.27). Similarly, Walker (1985) as cited in Clough and Nutbrown (2007) gave a parable ‘just as recipes are not simply things that are done to food, but become concepts within which method and substance are compounded’ (p.27). Even though, the methods split up between the researcher and the participants, the methods become a powerful instrument to bridge the gap between the researcher and participants. It can be said that the method help the researcher to choose and use appropriate methods that fit to his/her research, then, it is the job of methodology to explain the reasons why to use the methods and show how to go and find out the knowledge.

Some theorists express a slightly different definition of methodology. According to Sikes (2004) methodology is a theory of getting knowledge through systematic methods. Sikes further claimed that methodology is concerned with ‘the description and analysis of research methods rather than with the actual, practical use of the method’ (p.16). For example, a research project (methodology) needs to use procedure (method) e.g. interviews, observation, questionnaires to collect the information or data. While Harding (1987) defined the methodology as a theory and analyzed how a research method should proceed, Glough & Nutbrown (2007) emphasized that methodology is how to provide reasons why the researchers use the methods (procedures) in relation to the kind of knowledge the researcher is investigating. From these definitions, it can be concluded that methodology is a theory of producing and communicating knowledge, describing and analyzing the methods or procedures, and providing some reasons why the researchers use the methods. It is clear now that methodology has purpose to guide and lead the researchers to find reasons why and how to do a research systematically and empirically. Another thing, it can guide the researchers to fit the methodology in the research process.

To fit the methodology in the research process is very important. Maanen (1995) as cited in Gough (2002) argued that doing a research involves fieldwork, headwork and text work (p.7):

1. Fieldwork is enacting methods by:
  - listening to and/or interrogating informants.
  - observing behaviors and interaction of human beings.
  - Analyzing and examining historical records and traces.
2. Headwork is thinking about:
  - Methodological issues such as theories, analyses and criticism of how research should be proceed.
  - epistemological issues such as theories of knowledge and their adequacy and justificatory strategies.
3. Text work is producing texts, stories, narratives including, for example,
  - testimonies to fieldwork, and head work.
  - critique and/or alternative readings of other text.

Researchers also need to think methodological questions. According Gough (2002) asking a methodological question is to help the researchers to carry out the research in order to meet the requirements of higher degree education or to have a better

understanding of the research. There are at least three kinds of methodological questions of research activity, that is, personal questions, field questions and research questions (Clough & Nutbrown, p. 26, 2001).

- a. Personal questions. Researchers must ask questions of themselves about what drives their research and the location of themselves in their research.
- b. Field questions. The formulation of these empirical questions follows the development of research questions.
- c. Research questions. The careful formulation of research questions which form the major planks of any research study-is the key to the realization of a successful research study, however large or small. Research question is to define the limit of the study and identify empirical issues and work on empirical questions.

### **Ethics guidelines of research**

Before researchers start doing a research, the researchers have to observe and learn carefully and attentively to a set of ethics guidelines in research. It is believed that ethics in research is how to conduct research in respectful manner. In respectful manner means being fair, sincere, trustworthy, genuine, loyal, and honourable with high integrity in conducting a research. It is identified that at least there are three different set of fundamental principles in conducting research, that is, beneficence, respect and justice.

1. Beneficence is a principle that required people to do or act that brings good things or benefits for others (Kitchener & Kitchener, 2009 and Macfarlane, 2009). For example, when a researcher do a research about drugs abuse in high schools, the research outcome benefits to the schools to fight against the drug abuse and at the same the researcher can add knowledge about fighting the drug abuse.
2. Justice is a principle of fair in which people are treated each other in a fair manner particularly in distributing goods and services in a community(Kitchener & Kitchener, 2009). For example, if a researcher expects to be treated fairly, then, the researcher should treat fairly participants.
3. Respect is a principle to treat people as autonomous individuals (Kitchener & Kitchener, 2009) and in dignity manners. They further continued that being autonomous means a freedom to do, act, or choose what the individuals want to with their own choice in life. For example, a researcher cannot force participants to be interviewed if the participants reject to do the interview.

Actually, these three principles in conducting research is to guide a researcher in pursuit a truth in dignity manners and to protect the participants' right and values (Cohen, 2008) particularly those who are vulnerable such as children, women and minority people. According to Silva (1995) as cited in Ezzy & Liamputtong (2005, p. 203) vulnerable people are those who experience 'diminished autonomy due to physiological/psychological factors or status inequalities'. In other words, the individual is less able or not able to make decision for himself/herself. The vulnerable are, for instance, children, eldest, minority people, pregnant women, mentally disabled persons, poor, and the like. It is thus very important to protect these vulnerable people' rights and welfares and safeguard them from being potentially exploited and harmed (Ezzy & Liamputtong, 2005).

At last, the following statements are some of the ethical principles adapted from Cohen (2008, p.77) need to be considered when conducting a research;

1. Agree individuals' rights to privacy

2. Respect people's rights and dignity and interest.
3. Be honest or justify dishonesty.
4. Ensure anonymity/confidentiality/non-traceability.
5. Gain permission from all relevant parties e.g. parents/guardian, schools or principles.
6. Respect vulnerability.
7. Agree respondent validation.
8. Agree ownership of the data.
9. Avoid causing unnecessary offence.
10. Demonstrate social responsibility and obligations.
11. Don't abuse the power and position as a researcher.
12. Don't use dangerous methods.

## Discussion

So what is a good research actually?.It is argued that there are three things that make a good research.

Firstly, a good research must be scientific. It means that whenever a researcher does a research, it must be based on experience and reasoning in which natural sciences are concerned. It also includes how a researcher does a research in systematic, convincing, objective and creative in terms of procedure and methodology with a dept, rigorous and critical analysis. Moreover, the finding of research, something new or not previously known before, can contribute or add to the corpus of knowledge. The finding of the research proved to be convincingly changing our understanding of something. It even changes of our paradigm of looking for something at certain thing.

Secondly, a good research must be beneficial and applicable. It brings beneficial and applicable to the community or society. It is strongly believe that a research and its contribution must bring benefits and something better and useful to our community or society. In other words, it does not only bring something that mattered to our community but also some bring changes in our community. For example, the finding of the research can make the community or society change their paradigm or they have a new perspective on a certain issue. Another example, the government can apply the finding of research to become a government policy, regulation, or even law. It is therefore important for the researcher to communicate his/her research finding to a particular community or society.

Thirdly, a good research must be ethical. When a researcher starts conducting a good research, a researcher must be carefully pay attention to a guideline of ethics in research. It is believed that there are two most important things that need to be concerned in ethical research, that is, respect and honesty. Respect refers to how the researcher treats the participants as human being in dignity manners. For example, the researcher must respect the rights of his or her participants. Whereas respect refers to human dignity, honesty refers to being fair, sincere, trustworthy, genuine, honorable and loyal with high integrity in conducting a research. For example, a researcher must not manipulate or make up the data of research. I do think these three things of a good research as I have mentioned above can help a researcher to be a good research in the future.

## CONCLUSION

Research is not only to observe, answer and understand the phenomena around the world but also to have deep understanding the approaches, processes, and ethics of the

research itself. In this way, it can help a researcher to the discovery of truth. It is believed that following all the guidelines of research can help researchers to find the answer. It is also important to follow the guidelines of ethical principles of research. As discussed in discussion above, the three things of a good research can help a researcher to be a honest, respected, sincere, careful and genuine researcher. These characters can lead to a good research and researcher.

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