Eğitim-Bir-Sen

NİTEL EĞİTİM ARAŞTIRMALARINDA BİLGİ KURAMI: BASILI MAKALE İNCELEMELERİ

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Öz: Bu çalışma nitel eğitim çalışmalarının epistemolojik temellerini irdelemektedir. Bu bağlamda nitel eğitim çalışmalarına dayanan 20 makale incelenmiştir. Araştırmacı üç boyutu ele almıştır: (1) çalışmanın maksat ve amacı, (2) çalışmanın temeli, ve (3) epistemolojik yönlerinin (teori, paradigma, metodoloji ve yansıması) varlığı. Çalışma hâlihazırda var olan çalışmaları analiz eden geçmişe dönük betimsel yaklaşım yöntemi kullanmıştır. Çalışma, analize dayalı olarak, 2014 ve 2015 yılları arasında basılmış ve Taylor & Francis makale veri sisteminde yer alan rastgele seçilmiş 20 makale ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda irdelenen makalelerin çoğunun epistemolojik özellikler taşıdığı görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: epistemoloji, nitel metotlar, araştırma metotları, eğitim araştırmaları

EPISTEMOLOGY IN QUALITATIVE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH: A REVIEW OF PUBLISHED ARTICLES

Abstract: This study explores the epistemological basis for qualitative educational research studies. Within this context, 20 qualitative studies on education were analysed and three dimensions were sorted out: (1) the purpose or aim of the study, (2) the rationale for the study, and (3) the occurrence of epistemological aspects (theory, paradigm, methodology and reflexivity). The study employed a retrospective descriptive approach to analyse research studies that have been conducted. Based on an examination, a random sample of 20 articles published between 2014 and 2015 in the Taylor & Francis Group content were determined. Based on the results, majority of the evaluated articles were found to have epistemological features.

Key Words: epistemology, qualitative methods, research methods, educational research

Educational research has been introduced as an organised inquiry practice that is devised to pile, examine, define, and employ data to comprehend, explain, assume, or handle an educational event. Since hypothetical questions in education arise from diverse notions and clarifications of social reality, various paradigms have been contained to decide about the principle according to which one would choose and interpret problems for inquiry (Ng Hà, 2011). We cannot say a paradigm is right, or wrong. Yet, paradigms are mighty approaches to see the reality, being the windows providing data about the society. Besides, they build the specific questions to make us find solutions (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

Guba and Lincoln (2005) state that every research conductor owns a paradigm that directs the study, a perspective of the process of knowledge production consisting of the main compounds of epistemology (nature of knowledge), ontology (nature of existence), methodology (the most proper ways to construct knowledge), and axiology (the role of values in knowledge formation). Epistemological theories are related to how knowledge can be formed, gained and communicated (Scotland, 2012). Meta-theoretical assumptions on epistemology imply that objective reality occurs beyond the human mind according to positivism, while knowledge of the world is purposely formed through an individual's experiences according to interpretivist. The assumptions of epistemology direct our preferences as to our choice of topics, research questions, underlying theories, methodology, analyses, and conclusions (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011; Pascale, 2010).

The concept of reality is called ontology while the view of how we acquire knowledge is titled epistemology. Ontology is the initial stage which will probably direct us to our own theoretical framework. When one examines ontology, he or she understands what it means when something is said to be existing. If ontologists work on what is meant when something is said to be existing, then an epistemologist works on what is meant by saying something is known (Mack, 2010).

In the field of educational research, the difference between quantitative and qualitative research methods is important, because for some academicians, the two paradigms are adverse (Mustafa, 2011). It is useful to think about a program's goal on research of education when we make a distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods. By

looking at the quantitative dimension, the goal of any research on teaching is to gather the facts of human behaviour that are going to supply proof and amplification on a hypothesis which will let the researchers to put forward causes and anticipate the behaviour of a human being. However, when it comes to the goal of qualitative research, its goal is to comprehend human behaviour and background beyond the behaviours as well as to understand the mechanisms in which humans form the mean in order to explain what means mean (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). Furthermore, in terms of reflexivity, researchers form a continuous and analytical consciousness of social contributions constructing the formation of knowledge in their studies (Koch and Harrington, 1998) which can be powered up by means of noticing and interpreting cultures in which we are located and as a result construct our viewpoints, be more conscious open minded or fair. That's to say, through becoming aware of how we know the world, we perceive the world more successfully (Takacs, 2003). Functional epistemology makes us reflect on the relations between how research is conducted and the validity of research outcomes. This reflection is determined by an analysis of our specific knowledge construction mechanisms (Becker, 1996).

Research refers to finding solutions to some questions (Goddard and Melville, 2004). In their study, the aim of Strauss and Corbin (1998) was to provide the basic knowledge and principals needed by individuals who are about to embark on their initial qualitative research studies and who desire constructing theory at the substantive level. When it comes to my study, I have focused my discussion on epistemology as a research practice which devotes to the formation of knowledge in the field of education. That's to say, my aim in this paper is to discuss the administration of epistemological features to aid educational studies referring to qualitative approaches.

Research Questions

This study focuses on the epistemological engagement in educational qualitative research studies. In other words, it constructs a framework of epistemological approaches employed in educational qualitative research studies by examining the presence of epistemological indicators in the related articles.

To address the issue the following research questions were put forward:

1. How are the study purposes represented in qualitative educational research studies?

2. To what extent the rationale is involved in qualitative educational research studies?

3. To what extent epistemological aspects occur in qualitative educational research studies?

Methodology

Based upon a content analysis, this paper employed descriptive research design with a view to identify the epistemological characteristics contained in a random sample of 20 articles published between 2014 and 2015 in the Taylor & Francis Group content which includes world-class authors, from leading scientists and researchers, to scholars and professionals operating at the top of their fields, and which are one of the world's leading publishers of scholarly journals, books, eBooks, text books and reference works. Besides, the study of Gringeri, Barusch and Cambron (2013) was taken into consideration as a guiding study, which explores the epistemological foundations of qualitative social work research, and in which a template-based review was completed on a high number of articles from social work journals. The emerged themes in the study were inspired from the mentioned study of Gringeri, Barusch and Cambron (2013).

Data analysis and Results

Each article was examined focusing on epistemological aspects, and for each emerging epistemological theme, a frequency test was run utilizing the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program. Then, examples for each emerging theme were given in sentences regarding the mentioned features of epistemology in educational research. The analysis of the articles covered dimensions such as the purpose or aim of the study, the rationale for the study, the population worked on, the occurrence of epistemological markers (theory, paradigm, methodology and reflexivity), and the implications given. In other words, textual data were analysed to aid the descriptive statistics with reference to the epistemological dimensions of every paper.

Table 1

Purpose of the Research

	N	f	%
aim	20	15	75
explore	20	10	50
examine	20	8	40
report	20	2	10

By looking at Table 1, we can easily understand that the most frequently used verb defining the purpose in the analysed articles is *aim* (%75). Then comes the verb *explore* (%50) which refers to more descriptive work resulting in general implications rather than the progress of the analysis with links to theoretical definitions. Afterwards, the verb *examine* (%40) comes third while the verb report (%10) appears with the least frequency. Sample sentences reflecting these verbs are presented below:

"The *aim* of the article is to understand the role of decision making in the emergence of educational trajectories (Walther, Warth, Ule and du Bois-Reymond, 2015)."

"This article *explores* the concept of "cleverness" as it is employed by Tanzanian youth to improve their likelihood of succeeding in school (Vavrus, 2013)."

"The article *examines* how divergent disciplinary hinterlands influence the enactments of research methods, and how the choice of research approach affects the types of knowledge and realities produced in the research process (Rimpiläinen, 2015)."

"The data *reported* in this paper forms part of a larger research project investigating a range of emotions involved in tertiary learning (including negative emotions) (Rowe, Fitness, Wood, 2015). "

Table 2

Rationale for the Work

	N	f	%
the problem	20	12	60
practical implications	20	9	45
gap in literature	20	3	15
neglect voices	20	3	15

According to Table 2, *the problems* (%60) in the studies appear with highest rates. *Practical implications* (%45) come second by looking at its percentage. Furthermore, *gap in literature* and *neglect voices* (%15) appear at mutual rates. Sample sentences reflecting these themes are presented below:

"While this close connection has certain advantages, such as promoting encounters with the labour market and facilitating finding employment after education, it also poses some *problems* as it has the potential to extensively impact students' decisions, and companies may use the collaboration to cherry-pick the best students (Tikkanen, Bledowski and Felczak, 2015). "

"This study also has *implications* for teacher education programs around the country, especially those that prepare teachers to work in low-income communities of colour (Liou, Martinez, and Rotheram-Fuller, 2015)."

"For example, although many visual research methods rely on photographic media as data, many studies ignore the theoretical and philosophical *literature* concerning photography as a social phenomenon (Metcalfe, 2015)."

"In some ways, she uses the images to "speak" for the children, whose *voices* are not heard in the study through interviews or other methods (Metcalfe, 2015)."

Table 3

Epistemological Concepts

	N	f	%
methodology	20	20	100
theory	20	19	95
reflection	20	11	55
paradigm	20	8	40

It can be understood from Table 3 that *methodology* section appears in every research studies analysed. Besides, *theory* is mentioned in the papers with a frequency of %95. Then *reflection* (%55) comes third and finally *paradigm* occurs with an emergence of %40. Sample sentences reflecting these concepts are presented below:

"This *qualitative approach* to exploring educational systems' interaction with homeless youth and families provides the opportunity to more fully understand how systems respond to this complex issue (Hallett, Miller, and Skrla, 2015)."

"The coding process comprised a combination of qualitative content analysis and *grounded theory* (Walther, Warth, Ule and du Bois-Reymond, 2015)."

"In these *reflexive* moments, the participants took control of time and space to reflect on their discourses at a speed appropriate to their work-related contexts (James, 2015)."

"Understanding research methods performatively would do away with alleged hierarchies between different research approaches as well as *paradigms*. This opens up a way for analysing research methods without having to make epistemological value judgements in terms of their supposed validity and reliability in 'describing the world', when the methods in fact participate in generating the world (Rimpiläinen, 2015). "

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of research is to find out solutions to problems by means of applying scientific procedures (Kothari, 2004). The progress and discussion of epistemological aspects encourage the possible knowledge contributions of qualitative research (Gringeri, Barusch and Cambron,

2013). Research is not only a phase of collecting data, as is occasionally stated, but it is about responding to unanswered questions (Goddard and Melville, 2004). In their study, the intent of Strauss and Corbin (1998) was to supply the fundamental knowledge and procedures required by those who are about to embark on their first qualitative research projects and who want to build theory at the substantive level. Hence, they believed that they have something to offer in the way of techniques and procedures to those researchers who want to do qualitative analysis but who do not wish to build theory. It is the selection of paradigm that attributes to the intentions, beliefs, motivation and expectations for the research. Without initially appointing a paradigm, there is no ground for ensuing preferences as to the methodology, methods, literature or research design (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). With this study, it was aimed to highlight the epistemological engagement in educational qualitative research studies. In other words, the study constructs a framework of epistemological approaches employed in educational qualitative research studies by examining the presence of epistemological indicators in the related articles. The picture drawn by twenty qualitative research articles illustrates that:

- The most frequently used term defining the purpose in the analyzed articles is *aim* which is a very common verb employed in research studies while the following ones are *explore, examine* and *report*. The verbs *explore* (meaning to learn about something by trying it) and *report* (meaning to tell people about something) refer to more descriptive study giving way to common implications rather than development of the analysis. On the other hand, the verb *examine* (meaning to inquire into carefully) suggests a study which refers to a more advanced analysis.

- In terms of the rationale involved in the study, we can conclude that the *problems* mentioned in the papers appear with highest rates while *practical implications* come second. Moreover, *gap in literature* which justified the study and *neglect voices* appear at mutual rates coming after problems and practical implication.

- Regarding the epistemological issues, *methodology* section appears in every qualitative research studies analysed. Furthermore, *theory* is mentioned at a very high rate in the studies analysed. Following them, *reflection* and *paradigms* come indicating the epistemological aspects.

As epistemological features keep research conductors at high levels of accountability, this study has analysed the occurrence of epistemological indicators in 20 educational qualitative studies published between 2014 and 2015. The results obtained from this study may prove to be of some help for educational research conductors studying in education fields.

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