

Reflection On Ontological, Epistemological And Methodological Perspectives: What Is The Difference Between Qualitative And Quantitative Research?

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Abstract: This is a critical review of Fekede Tuli's paper titled "The Basis of Distinction between Qualitative and Quantitative Research in Social Science: Reflection on Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological Perspectives". This work looks at Fekede's publication with the view of showing how the power of persuasion has been employed by the author. As Neuman (2003), argues, 'there is no single, absolutely correct methodology to social science research' but rather the methodologies represent different ways of looking at the world – ways to observe, measure and understand social reality'. The choice of a methodology by extension relies upon the nature of reality, the purpose of doing research, and the type of knowledge that can be produced as a result of one's decision to conduct a study onto a particular issue. Fekede Tuli advances that the selection of research methodologies depends on fitness for purpose. Fitness for purpose here referring to effectiveness and ability of a methodology to produce satisfactory research findings from the proposed study. This paper seeks to explore how the author has employed the power of literary persuasion in the discussion the topic under study.

I. INTRODUCTION

The power of persuasion scores more when a persuader decides to narrate personal experiences that contain similar challenges as those, she or he is passing over to the readers. As an academician and lecturer, Fekede Tuli kicks off the discussion in his article by drawing his readers' attention unto his personal experiences. Fekede deeply understands the power of using such a technique as seen from the manner in which he passionately talks about his encounter with the university environment. He says, 'as a starting point, it draws on my own personal experience of how teachers and students conceptualize the two research methodologies: qualitative and quantitative in my work place, (Jimma University).' As a persuader, the author finds it easier to arrest his audience's attention and makes it vulnerable to submit to his viewpoint easily using this perspective.

The author technically approaches the issue under discussion from a very cautious perspective. He portrays his awareness to the fact he knows that the reader had some knowledge about the subject even before views are presented

to the reader. Fekede doesn't dispute this fact. He instead compromises what he has to say by expounding on related works by other scholars in comparison to what he is writing on. In a very tactful modus, he is discussing matters logic that stretches to ontology, epistemology and methodology as the guiding principles of his study.

II. MAIN REVIEW

Fekede Tuli unveils the discussion about the basis of distinction between qualitative and quantitative research in social science by beginning with the known concepts and works towards the unknown ones. The author is awake to the existence of other researchers' works and studies that equally contributes to the school of knowledge in the realms of qualitative and quantitative research. In order to persuade successfully, Fekede takes time to critically analyze what previous scholars say about the issue which gives him more authority in discussing the topic. Therefore, invoking a persuasive argument about qualitative and quantitative

research becomes easier because readers have gained confidence in the piece. This is possible as it is backed by other scholar's views. 'As a result of this intellectual debate purists have emerged on both sides i.e. the quantitative purist and the qualitative purist,' he acknowledges.

Scenically, Fekede moderately uses his voice to reverberate the agenda that was previously advanced by other authorities in the same field. This style of persuasion is effective from the manner in which it navigates around tangible and published sources as a backup for his views. Although his is a relatively new idea, he relies on the readers' understanding of qualitative and quantitative research in order to gain grounding for his advances. He preys on what ancient philosophers and scholars have done in the field of social science research which consequently employ to a large extent the two types of research; that is qualitative and quantitative research which social scientists use to a greater extent.

His interest is to bring out in the most effective way the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research in social science. But for him to do that, his core ammunition has to be smuggled into the discourse, for Fekede to win this persuasion battle. He comments that, 'although these methodologies are acknowledged as a means to conduct research, scholars within the social science have argued that the relative preference of each research methodology depends on philosophical issues related to the question of ontology and epistemology.

The paper is meant to lay a distinction unto the many research methodologies that are related and used in social sciences. The author however does this by dwelling on their (research methodologies) connection with the philosophical and theoretical view of research that guide the work of researchers in social science. For this to be realised, a leveling ground has to be created. He pre-sets the connection, and the semantics of key terminologies in the simplest way possible. He interprets that research methodology depends on the paradigm that guides the research activity, more specifically, beliefs about the nature of reality and humanity (ontology); the theory of knowledge that informs the research (epistemology), and how that knowledge may be gained (methodology).

The scholar adapts Popkewitz, Tabachnick & Zeichner, (1979) remarks that, a consideration of epistemology, ontology and methodology must be a central feature of any discussion about the nature of social science research, as these elements give shape and definition to the conduct of an inquiry.

The author interrogates the nature of knowledge that individuals cling to. He comes up with positivism and interpretivism-constructivism, being the two broad epistemological positions in social science research. Positivism sees social science as an organized method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behavior in order to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity. On the other hand he posits, that from an interpretivist-constructivist perspective, the theoretical framework for most qualitative research, sees the world as constructed, interpreted, and experienced by people in their interactions with each other and with the wider social systems.

Fekede Tuli rolls out his discussion carpet on which he presents the available groups of knowledge. He begins by first giving the reader a glimpse of all of them. However, as he builds the argument, he tends to lean more towards the positivism epistemological position. This is seen from the comment that, for one to delve into a social science research, the search for knowledge (epistemology), revolves around the nature of reality and humanity (ontology), all which requires a methodology (the procedure) by which the process will be executed. Therefore, Fekede Tuli's decision to use the three prisms to differentiate qualitative from quantitative research in social sciences is justified in the end.

In an efficacious way, Fekede Tuli makes it in differentiating between qualitative and quantitative research. He in deed made it through by looking at the two from an inductive viewpoint. According to Tuli, qualitative research methodologies are inductive, that is, oriented toward discovery and process, have high validity, are less concerned with generalizability, and are more concerned with deeper understanding of the research problem in its unique context.

He adds that interpretive researchers use qualitative research methodologies to investigate, interpret and describe social realities (ontology). Another scholar, Mutch, (2005), recons that the research findings in qualitative methodology are usually reported descriptively using words. More intriguing to annotate, is the assertion that qualitative researchers who include positivists regard respondents to as research participants rather than sheer objects in the research.

Tuli says that when regarded this way, the participants have an obligation to themselves to ensure that the history they write about themselves through the responses is a true reflection of whom they are. At this point, the writer of this paper has been able to explain in detail about the qualitative research in social science by encompassing the nature of reality and humanity (ontology) perspective i.e. the researcher and the respondents. True to that, Cohen, *et al* (2000), comments that in any research endeavor, linking research and philosophical traditions or schools of thought helps clarify a researcher's theoretical frameworks.

In conclusion, Fekede Tuli upholds that quantitative methodology is concerned with attempts to quantify social phenomena, collect and analyze numerical data, and focus on the links among a smaller number of attributes across many cases. Qualitative methodology on the other hand is more concerned with understanding the meaning of social phenomena and focus on links among a larger number of attributes across relatively few cases. Notice the simplicity with which the two methodologies have been defined in the end. The strategic plugins hereof center on *quantifying social phenomena* when he talks about quantitative research. He immediately and deliberately defines qualitative research as one that is geared towards; understanding the meaning of social phenomena and focus on links among a larger number of attributes across relatively few cases.

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