

## **Qualitative Research is not a Unified Paradigm: Implications for the Evaluation of Qualitative Research Studies**

Qualitative research is very popular in social science. When compared with quantitative research studies, the common characteristics seen among qualitative research studies stand out. Nonetheless, when the philosophical and methodological foundations of the latter are examined carefully, their variations surface. Qualitative research is not a unified paradigm. The current paper reviews the literature on research paradigms in social science and based on this review presents four implications regarding the evaluation of qualitative research studies. These are: (1) the necessity for divergent evaluation criteria, (2) the importance of a clear indication of the researchers' paradigm, (3) the possibility of a single criterion, and (4) the impracticality of setting evaluation criteria. These implications are contradictory. This incompatibility reflects the complexity of establishing evaluation criteria for qualitative research studies and the diversity of these studies. At the end, the paper also provides an implication for researchers in international development studies (IDS). Namely, the IDS researchers should be self-reflexive in the research paradigm of their own studies.

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## 1. Introduction

Qualitative research studies have a common root. They equally explore in-depth meanings of social phenomena and have subjective, inductive, and interpretive natures regardless of any differences in approaches (e.g., narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study) (Hammersley 2007). Because of the commonly shared characteristics, a single criterion to evaluate qualitative research studies may be possible. Nonetheless, they are increasingly diversified in respect to their philosophical and methodological foundations. Hence, the idea that qualitative research studies are a single unified research paradigm seems irrelevant. If each study is situated in a distinct research paradigm, it seems unreasonable to evaluate the studies with a single criterion.

This paper discusses the implications for the evaluation of qualitative research studies based on the notion that qualitative research is not a unified paradigm. For this, a profound understanding of this notion is indispensable. The next section clarifies the term ‘research paradigm’, traces the diversification of the paradigms in science, and discusses divergent paradigms in qualitative research. The third section discusses the implications of this trend for the evaluation of qualitative research studies. The fourth provides an implication for the researchers in international development studies (IDS) in connection with divergent research paradigms. The last section wraps up the discussion.

## 2. Paradigm Debate

### 2.1 Research paradigm

The origin of the word ‘paradigm’ is the Greek word paradeigm that means pattern (Antwi & Hamza 2015). Allegedly, Kuhn (1962) first used the term ‘paradigm’ in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Antwi & Hamza 2015; Mertens 2012). Arguably, in the beginning, ‘Kuhn regarded the social sciences as pre-paradigmatic, at best, and therefore as not characterised by competing paradigms [of natural science], in his sense of the word’ (Hammersley 2007, p. 292), but later he accepted paradigms as useful in social science (Jackson 2015). Kuhn (1962) defined a ‘paradigm’ as an ‘entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on, shared by the members of a given community’ (p. 162), and a ‘research paradigm’ as ‘the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed’ (Kuhn 1962). Although there are widely varied definitions of research paradigm as discussed in the followings, this paper utilises Kuhn’s (1962) definition.

Later researchers have elaboratively interpreted and incompatibly used the term ‘research paradigm’. Madill and Gough (2008) proposed four common ways to interpret the meaning of research paradigms. They are: (1) ‘worldview’, (2) ‘epistemological stance’, (3) ‘shared belief’, and (4) ‘model example’ (p. 263). These interpretations are not mutually exclusive but relate to one another at distinct levels (Madill & Gough 2008).

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) claim that:

*paradigm constitutes the abstract beliefs and principles that shape how a researcher sees the*

*world, and how s/he interprets and acts within that world. It is the lens through which a researcher looks at the world. It is the conceptual lens through which the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project to determine the research methods that will be used and how the data will be analysed (p. 26).*

Guba and Lincoln (1994) provide more detailed and concrete clarification. They regard research paradigms as ‘the basic belief system or worldview that guides investigators, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways’ (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p. 105). In other words, a research paradigm is a worldview that controls ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions in research studies (Guba & Lincoln 1994). An ontological question asks, ‘what is the nature of “knowable”?’ or, what is the nature of “reality”?’ (Guba 1990, p. 18). Meanwhile, an epistemological question seeks ‘what is the nature of relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?’ (Guba 1990, p. 18). And a methodological question inquires ‘how should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?’ (Guba 1990, p. 18). Later, Lincoln and Guba (2003) added axiological assumptions into the elements of research paradigms to ‘make values (the branch of philosophy dealing with ethics, aesthetics and religion) a part of the basic foundational philosophical dimension of paradigm proposal’ (p. 169). Axiological assumptions are critical for many qualitative research studies because of the value-laden nature of the studies. According to Lincoln and Guba (2003), a research paradigm is a worldview that controls ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological assumptions in research studies. The figure below describes the idea.

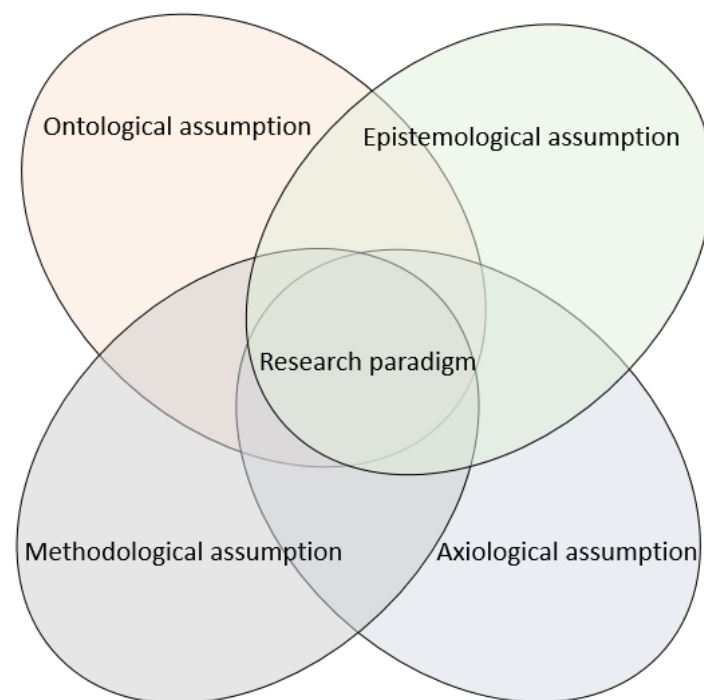


Figure: Research paradigm and four philosophical assumptions

Importantly, although this is one of the popular interpretations of the research paradigm, it is also only one of many interpretations. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009), for example, mention that the research paradigm controls not only Lincoln and Guba's (2003) four philosophical assumptions but also the 'rhetorical' assumption (p. 266), which deals with the specific methods for using language in scientific research. Other researchers (e.g., Grix 2002) regard that as not a combination of the philosophical assumptions but a specific orientation in a specific philosophical assumption that determines the research paradigm. Others (e.g., Hammersley 2012) claim a theory can be a paradigm. Yet others (e.g., Antwi & Hamza 2015; Biesta 2010; Johnson et al. 2007) believe quantitative research and qualitative research are research paradigms. Based on Kuhn's (1962) definition that a research paradigm is 'the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists', these clarifications are all acceptable. The research paradigms discussed in the following sub-section are based on this understanding.

## 2.2 Diversification of research paradigms

Quantitative research, qualitative research, and mixed methods research themselves are often considered as distinctive research paradigms (see e.g., Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004; Sale et al. 2002). Those who own this view typically believe that a research paradigm emerged in quantitative research (Gunasekare 2015), then expanded to qualitative research and mixed methods research (Antwi & Hamza 2015). The following describes the historical development of the research paradigm.

In the 19th century, quantitative research was considered as 'the first research paradigm that incorporated ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions and principles' (Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2009, p. 266). Researchers rely on statistical analysis using quantitative (mostly numerical) data. They assume that human behaviour is predictable and explainable (Antwi & Hamza 2015), and they seek cause-and-effect relationships between variables or test hypotheses and theories with empirical data as objectively as possible. They also consider that the findings are generalisable to a larger population. At the turn of the 20th century, some social science researchers started to refute the philosophical assumptions and principles of quantitative research. They began to rely on qualitative research, which then extended its use in social science by the middle of the 20th century (Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2009). These researchers describe, explain, explore, and interpret a social phenomenon in natural settings utilising qualitative (mostly non-numerical) data. They believe that human behaviour is dynamic and transformable depending on time, place, and other contingent factors. Their interest is not in generalising human behaviour by examining observable facts, but in understanding the meaning of the patterns of human behaviour that exist behind the visible facts. Thus, the qualitative paradigm became the rival of the quantitative paradigm (Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2005). Later, in the 1960s, the notion of mixing quantitative and qualitative research methods appeared (Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2009). As the mixing of the two methods became widely diffused, the mixed methods research paradigm emerged as a third paradigm (Gunasekare 2015; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004;

Johnson et al. 2007).

Quantitative research, qualitative research, and mixed methods research are frequently associated with specific epistemological orientations (Antwi & Hamza 2015; Biesta 2010; Johnson et al. 2007). In this view, quantitative research is linked to positivism (Grix 2002). Positivists underline the empirical nature of objectively found facts. They employ probabilistic models constructed by prior studies. Positivists believe that the findings of a study can be generalised to other studies under similar conditions (Antwi & Hamza 2015). Meanwhile, qualitative research studies are normally associated with interpretivism (Grix 2002). Interpretivists assert that human behaviour is multi-layered. Pre-defined probabilistic models cannot control human behaviour since it is mostly subjective in nature and influenced by environmental factors. Accordingly, interpretivists claim that studying human behaviour in the naturalistic condition, not in the controlled environment, is essential (Antwi & Hamza 2015). Finally, mixed methods research is associated with pragmatism. Pragmatism supports a paradigmatic integration and helps mixed methods research to co-exist with quantitative and qualitative research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004; Johnson et al. 2007).

### **2.3 Research paradigms in qualitative research**

This tripartite separation of research paradigms (i.e., either qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) seems oversimplified (Madill 2015; Morgan & Smircich 1980). The term 'qualitative' represents a type of method. It is not an umbrella term or superior to the term 'paradigm' (Guba & Lincoln 1994). On the contrary, qualitative research can be used under 'any research paradigm' (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p. 105) because 'there is flexibility in the purposes to which many qualitative methods can be put and the particular paradigmatic framework they can serve' (Madill & Gough 2008, p. 259). When the connection with multiple philosophical assumptions is considered, we can see a variety of research paradigms in qualitative research.

Creswell (2012) refers to five key paradigms, or what he calls 'interpretative frameworks' (pp. 15-41), in qualitative research. They are: (1) 'post-positivism', (2) 'social constructivism', (3) 'transformative frameworks / postmodern perspective', (4) 'pragmatism', and (5) 'critical theory / critical race theory, feminist theory, queer theory, and disability theory' (Creswell 2012, pp. 22-34). The following table lists four philosophical assumptions of each of these paradigms.

Table: Research paradigms and philosophical assumptions

Assump- tions Paradigm	Ontological assumption	Epistemologica l assumption	Axiological assumption	Methodological assumption
Post-positivism	A single reality exists 'out there', but researchers may not understand it.	Reality can only be approximated.	Researcher's biases need to be controlled and not expressed in a study.	Deductive methods are important.
Social constructivism	Multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences.	Reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched.	Individual values are honoured.	Inductive method of emergent ideas is used.
Transformative/ postmodern	Researcher and communities/ individuals being studied participate.	Findings are co-created with multiple ways of knowing.	Indigenous values are respected.	Collaborative processes of research are used.
Pragmatism	Reality is what is useful, is practical, and works.	Reality is known through using many tools that reflect both deductive and inductive evidence.	Values are discussed.	The process involves both quantitative and qualitative approach to data collection and analysis.
Critical, race, feminist, queer, disabilities	Reality is based on power and identity struggles.	Reality is known through the study of social structures, freedom and oppression, power, and control.	Diversity of values is emphasized within the standpoint of various communities.	Start with assumptions of power and identity struggles, document them, and call for action and change.

Source: adapted from Creswell (2012, pp. 36-37)



## 2.4 Variations in qualitative research and research paradigms

Qualitative research studies can be categorised into distinct groups based on the methodology they employ. Having researched the classifications of the predecessors (e.g., Crabtree & Miller 1992; Denzin & Lincoln 2011; Jacob 1987; Lancy 1993; Tesch 1990; Wolcott 1992), Creswell (2012) grouped the qualitative research studies in social science into five approaches: (1) 'narrative research', (2) 'phenomenological research', (3) 'grounded theory research', (4) 'ethnographic research', and (5) 'case study research' (pp. 7-12). Further, each approach can be decomposed into distinctive types. For instance, (1) narrative research can be broken down into: (a) 'biographical study', (b) 'auto-ethnography', (c) 'life history', and (d) 'oral history' (Creswell 2012, pp. 72-73). (2) Phenomenological research is further separated into: (a) 'hermeneutic phenomenology', (b) 'transcendental or psychological phenomenology', (c) 'empirical, transcendental phenomenology' (Creswell 2012, pp. 79-80). The other approaches can also be decomposed into multiple types (see Creswell 2012).

Importantly, each approach and each type within an approach are not necessarily tied up with any specific research paradigm (Madill & Gough 2008). Researchers can use any research approach (i.e., narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, or case study) or type while being situated in any paradigm to pursue their own theoretical and empirical goals. Grounded theory research is an example. Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory as an inductive method to generate theories in the early 1960s (Evans 2013). Since their publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967, different philosophical orientations have been brought into this approach. As a result, grounded theory has branched out into four types (Fernandez 2012). They are: (1) classic grounded theory (e.g., Glaser 1978), (2) Straussian grounded theory (e.g., Strauss & Corbin 1990), (3) constructivist grounded theory (e.g., Charmaz 2000), and (4) feminist grounded theory (e.g., Wuest 1995). Each type rests on a distinct paradigm: (1) Classic grounded theory is based on the post-positivist paradigm, (2) Straussian grounded theory is based on the interpretivist paradigm, (3) constructivist grounded theory is based on the constructivist paradigm, and (4) feminist grounded theory is based on the feminist paradigm (Levers 2013). Another example is case study research. Harrison et al. (2017) categorise case studies into three types based on paradigms, or what they call researchers' philosophical orientations. They types are: (1) a realist-post positivist case study (e.g., Yin 2014), (2) a pragmatic constructivist case study (e.g., Merriam 1998), and (3) a relativist-constructivist (or relativist-interpretivist) case study (e.g., Stake 1995, 2006).

As discussed, varied approaches (e.g., narrative research, phenomenological research, and so on) and types within each approach (e.g., a biographical study and auto-ethnography for a narrative research approach) exist in qualitative research. Each approach and type can be situated in a distinct research paradigm (e.g., post-positivism, social constructivism, and so on). Besides, as examples of grounded theory research and case study research show, one approach can rest on multiple paradigms.

There are many more paradigms than Creswell's (2012) five broad paradigms in qualitative research. For example, Tang (2011) points out that there are various schools in the social sciences and their



philosophical orientations can be grouped into eleven ‘foundational paradigms’ (p. 212). They are: (1) ‘materialism’, (2) ‘ideationalism’, (3) ‘individualism’, (4) ‘collectivism’, (5) ‘biological evolution determinism’, (6) ‘socialisation paradigm’, (7) ‘antisocialisation paradigm’, (8) ‘conflict paradigm’, (9) ‘harmony paradigm’ (Tang 2011, p. 217), (10) ‘social system paradigm’, and (11) ‘social evolution paradigm’ (Tang 2011, pp. 232-233). Because of these variations, it is reasonable to assert that qualitative research is not a unified paradigm.

### 3. The Implications for the Evaluation of Qualitative Research Studies

Based on the understanding that qualitative research is not a unified paradigm, this section presents and discusses four implications for the evaluation of qualitative research studies. The first implication is that because ‘qualitative research is not a unified paradigm’, divergent evaluation criteria are necessary. The second is that researchers must indicate the paradigm on which their study is based to secure a meaningful evaluation by readers. The third is that due to common characteristics shared among qualitative research studies, a single criterion is feasible. Finally, since the natures of qualitative research studies are incompatible with one another, the evaluation itself is impractical. These four implications are contradictory. The first and the second implications support divergent criteria. Meanwhile, the third proposes a single criterion, and the fourth refutes any criteria. This contradiction reflects the complexity of establishing evaluation criteria in qualitative research as well as the diversity of qualitative research.

#### 3.1 Necessity of divergent criteria

*Any attempt to establish a consensus on quality criteria for qualitative research is unlikely to succeed for the simple reason that there is no unified body of theory, methodology or method that can collectively be described as qualitative research (Rolfe 2006, p. 305).*

In the past, researchers in the field of management and organisation research evaluated studies using criteria derived from quantitative research (Hammersley 2007; Johnson 2015). They relied on criteria such as validity, reliability, generalisability, and replicability to assess qualitative research studies (Johnson 2015). Later, the notion that criteria must be in accordance with the characteristics of qualitative research emerged among social science researchers. For instance, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress that trustworthiness is essential to all qualitative research studies. The trustworthiness can be judged according to the degree to which the studies are: (1) credible, (2) transferable, (3) auditable, and (4) confirmable (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) contrast criteria that validate quantitative research studies and those that validate qualitative research studies. Desired criteria for the former are: (1) ‘internal validity’, (2) ‘external validity’, (3) ‘reliability’, and (4) ‘objectivity’ (p. 33). Meanwhile, those for the latter are: (1) ‘credibility’, (2) ‘dependability’, (3) ‘confirmability’, and (4) ‘transferability’ (p. 34).

Although Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria and Kivunja and Kuyini’s (2017) criteria are relevant to qualitative research studies in general, the exclusive use of these criteria causes what Johnson (2015, p.

321) calls 'a new monological criteriological mandate'. These criteria are set based on dichotomous positivist-interpretivist categorisation, and they fail to recognise the philosophical heterogeneity among qualitative research studies. In reality, as the previous section presented, 'there are different, and to some extent competing, "paradigms"' among qualitative research studies (Hammersley 2007, p. 292). As mentioned, studies that employ the case study method can be located either in a realist-post positivist paradigm, a pragmatic constructivist paradigm, or a relativist-constructivist (or relativist-interpretivist) paradigm (Harrison et al. 2017). Even though they are all called 'case study', a distinctive criterion should be applied to evaluate the value of each study.

Some researchers support the necessity of divergent evaluation criteria. Caelli et al. (2003) assert that each qualitative research study 'needs to be evaluated in a manner that is congruent with its epistemological and methodological origins' (p. 4) for a meaningful assessment. Johnson (2015) also proposes a 'more permissive, pluralistic and reflexive approach to research evaluation that accepts differences and heterogeneity in qualitative research' (p. 320). The necessity of divergent criteria therefore seems justifiable.

### **3.2 The Importance of a clear indication of the researchers' paradigm**

Readers often judge the quality of a qualitative research study based on their own worldview, which can be incompatible with that of the author. Without knowing what paradigm the study is underpinned, readers will never be able to appreciate the value of the study or to assess its quality constructively (Caelli et al. 2003; Johnson 2015).

Suppose a researcher using an interpretivist paradigm conducts a study, and positivists evaluate the study, the results will be miserable. The study will be regarded as a mere assembly of anecdotes, a researcher's subjective impression, a biased opinion, or idiosyncratic (see Anderson 2010; Mays & Pope 1995). The subject study will also be denounced over its limited replicability and duplicability due to the necessity for naturalistic conditions (see Mays & Pope 1995) and will be claimed to be unreliable as these conditions are so personal to researchers that they do not guarantee identical conclusions when other researchers implement the same studies (see Anderson 2010; Mays & Pope 1995). Further, the impossibility of generalising its findings to a larger population because of the comprehensive and in-depth data gathering method used will be regarded as a bottleneck. In contrast, when interpretivists assess the same study, its characteristics will be seen positively. Interpretivists underscore that the purpose of social science is to discover meanings hidden beneath visible social behaviour rather than to find observable facts. The disadvantages noted by positivists will be evaluated as salient features to help in attaining its aims.

Differences in paradigms profoundly influence our understanding of society and human behaviour. For example, qualitative research studies with realist worldviews hold assumptions that: (a) a reality exists independently from observers; (b) a reality can be understood as it is; and (c) a reality can be shared with

anyone in precisely the same manner (Campbell 1998). Constructivists refute these propositions and claim that: (a) knowledge is constructed by individuals and/or societies; (b) a reality exists independently from observers but may not be objective; (c) a good theory can make predictions that fit the impressions of reality (Campbell 1998). These researchers argue that qualitative research studies inevitably follow co-construction process and should be evaluated not on truthfulness or accuracy but on their political, ethical, and aesthetic consequences (Campbell 1998).

Profound comprehension of the paradigm that guides a study is indispensable for readers to be able to interpret the ontological, epistemological, and axiological position of the author and the methodology employed to answer research questions (Lietz & Zayas 2010). Hence, authors should clearly indicate the research paradigm on which their studies are underpinned (Hammersley 2007). The indication of the paradigm helps the readers to draw the right inference on the authors' judgement in their studies (Hammersley 2007). The indication also enhances communication between researchers and within researchers' communities (Kuhn 1962). Knowing the paradigms relating to studies, readers can understand what is being observed and examined, how questions are structured, what types of questions are being asked and explored, how experiments are conducted, and how the results obtained are being interpreted. This understanding assists research communities in making constructive arguments on the findings and in furthering the knowledge they seek.

### **3.3 Feasibility of a single criterion**

To re-consider the feasibility of a single criterion for qualitative research studies, we need to re-examine what evaluation criteria mean in this context. Hammersley (2007) provides two contrasting clarifications. One defines a criterion as an observable indicator that tells us the validity and the value of a qualitative research study. Under this definition, criteria can vary depending on the methods and practices that each study employs (Hammersley 2007). The other defines criterion as a list of implicit considerations that readers should have regard to when evaluating qualitative research studies. Local circumstance is an example of these implicit considerations. The list can change flexibly depending on contexts. However, the criteria on the list remain the same for any qualitative research studies, regardless of their differences in paradigms or methodologies. Hammersley (2007) suggests that while it is not completely satisfactory, the second clarification is more feasible and desirable for qualitative research studies than the first.

Tracy (2010) proposes a sort of universal evaluation criteria for qualitative research studies, no matter in which paradigms the studies are situated. These are: (1) 'worthy topic', (2) 'rich rigor', (3) 'sincerity', (4) 'credibility', (5) 'resonance', (6) 'significant contribution', (7) 'ethics', and (8) 'meaningful coherence' (p. 837). A primary concern of Tracy's (2010) criteria is the self-reflexivity of researchers over their own studies. In this sense, Tracy's (2010) criteria are similar to Hammersley's (2007) second clarification of his criteria. To be reflective, researchers must critically consider their own role in research. For example, they need to be sensitive to whether their own values and beliefs influence the topic of research, the

method of data collection, and the interpretation of findings. In addition, they must recognise, articulate, and mitigate the limitations of their works or consider alternative approaches (Tracy 2010). Watt (2007) also supports the importance of the reflexivity for researchers and emphasises that researchers must be self-reflexive both during and after their studies.

Besides the implicit consideration list and self-reflexivity, the principles of good practice and the trustworthiness of interpretation are also critically important to judge the quality of all qualitative research studies (Fossey et al. 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) support these principles and provide criteria to measure trustworthiness. Recently, Anderson (2017) proposed six criteria for all qualitative research studies to be regarded as a rigorous approach. They include: (1) 'reflexivity', (2) 'methodological coherence', (3) solving 'sampling and data access issues', (4) 'member checking of data collected', (5) 'discussion of transferability', and (6) 'ethical issues' (p. 130).

All the mentioned criteria (i.e., (i) Hammersley's (2007) implicit consideration list, (ii) Tracy's (2010) and (iii) Watt's (2007) self-reflexivity, (iv) Fossey et al.'s (2002) principals of good practice and trustworthiness of interpretation, (v) Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of trustworthiness, and (vi) Anderson's (2017) six criteria) examine distinctive features that every qualitative research study commonly shares. Hence, even though qualitative research is not a unified paradigm, any of these criteria may be used as a single evaluation criterion for all qualitative research studies.

### **3.4 Impracticability of setting criteria**

The final implication is that any criteria may be impractical or even unnecessary in qualitative research. For example, establishing evaluation criteria is unrealistic when studies are interpretative inquiries. Setting non-arbitrary criteria for interpretative studies causes confusion and inconsistency (Smith 1984). This is because the interests, values, and beliefs of each individual always influence his/her interpretation of social reality. Hence, it is not possible either to evaluate the interpretation of any individuals with a single criterion or to judge whether someone's interpretation is correct or wrong (Smith 1984).

There is another reason. All qualitative research studies are not necessarily explorative, explanative, or interpretative. Some are normative inquiries that have a distinctive aim of doing research. The explorative, explanative, and interpretative studies focus on human actions and try to develop theories about those actions. Researchers who conduct these studies are more interested in the development of new explanatory concepts and less interested in the practical application of the findings. Meanwhile, normative studies inquire with human actors and care about 'improving the rationality of a particular practice by enabling practitioners to refine the rationality of the practice for themselves' (Carr 1995, p. 118). Researchers using normative approaches believe that their studies have a political purpose, such as the eradication of social inequalities and discrimination. Accordingly, these researchers: (a) try to construct a dialogical relationship with research participants, (b) view the participants as players in a social phenomenon, (c) encourage practitioners to be critically reflective to their common sense, and (d) seek to

adopt a more critically protectable idea (Schwandt 1996). These researchers evaluate such studies based on the ability to transform institutions or to raise consciousness on the issues in society.

As the examples of imperative studies and normative studies indicate, the fundamentally incompatible disagreement among researchers over the significance of connecting studies with social and political activities makes establishing any criteria for qualitative research impractical.

#### **4. An Implication for Researchers in International Development Studies**

This section discusses an implication for IDS researchers in connection with the diversified paradigms in qualitative research. The implication is that IDS researchers should be self-reflexive in using their research paradigm when conducting qualitative research studies.

It is common that researchers specify the theoretical frameworks and methodologies that underlie their studies. Nonetheless, except for those who are educated in the UK, they rarely consciously explain the ontological and epistemological assumptions that constitute their research paradigm. This is partially because the research paradigm has often become an implicit understanding or common sense in the field. IDS researchers tend to have this view (see Sapkota 2019).

IDS is a unique research field as it has multiple purposes. It contributes to scientific theory as an ordinal academic discipline (Molteberg & Bergstrom 2000). However, IDS is more than knowledge creation. It is also action oriented (Sumner & Tribe 2008a, 2008b). Court and Maxwell (2005) claim that IDS researchers ‘care more than most about turning their research into policy’ (p. 714). Molteberg and Bergstrom (2000) also state that:

*Development Studies is research committed to improvement. Knowledge generation is not an end in itself... An implication of this is that Development Studies addresses current, actual problems, focusing on solving them – it tends to be applied and action- or policy-oriented (p. 7).*

Since IDS is about ‘development’ (Sumner & Tribe 2008b, p. 757), IDS researchers may be interested more in policy-oriented actions than pure academic discoveries.

Nevertheless, IDS researchers must be critically aware of their philosophical assumptions (Molteberg & Bergstrom 2000). This is because ‘the concept of paradigms is a good tool for addressing the problem of sharing and communication in the Development Studies discourse’ (Molteberg & Bergstrom 2000, p. 13). As discussed in section ‘3.2 The importance of a clear indication of the researchers’ paradigm’, without knowing the research paradigm of any qualitative research studies, readers are not able to appreciate the value of the studies or evaluate them constructively (Caelli et al. 2003; Johnson 2015).

Even if the purpose of a study is for ‘development’, IDS researchers need to clarify the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions of their own studies. For example, when an IDS researcher is basing their argument on the feminist paradigm, which also aims to change our society, he/she can clarify as follows:

*This study is based on the beliefs (a) that reality is based on power and identity struggles*

*(ontological assumption), (b) that reality is known through the study of social structures, freedom and oppression, power, and control (epistemological assumption), (c) that diversity of values is emphasised within the standpoint of various communities (axiological assumption), and (d) that the study starts with assumptions of power and identity struggles, documents them, and calls for action and change (methodological assumption) (see Creswell 2012).*

By having these clarifications, the readers can clearly understand the aim and the value of the study (Molteberg & Bergstrom 2000). If there are no such indications, the readers may overlook the critical essence of the study and the messages from the IDS researcher.

## 5. Conclusion

Although Kuhn (1962) had once regarded qualitative research as pre-paradigmatic (Hammersley 2007), it has gained paradigmatic status during the last half century. As the approaches, types, and philosophical assumptions of qualitative research studies have diversified, a qualitative research paradigm network also has branched out. Therefore, it is unreasonable to claim that qualitative research is a unified paradigm anymore.

Based on this notion, the paper discussed four implications in terms of the evaluation of qualitative research studies. The first implication is that divergent evaluation criteria are necessary. The second is that researchers need to indicate the paradigms in which their studies are situated to secure a meaningful evaluation by readers. The third is that a single criterion is feasible for qualitative research studies due to the common characteristics shared among them. Finally, setting any evaluation criteria is impractical because the assessment of any individual's interpretation is unrealistic, and the purposes of conducting qualitative research studies are profoundly incompatible with one another.

These four implications are contradictory. The first and the second support divergent criteria. Meanwhile, the third proposes a single criterion, and the fourth refutes any criteria proposed. This incompatibility reflects the complexity of establishing evaluation criteria in qualitative research and the diversity of qualitative research.

At the end, the paper also offered an implication for IDS researchers. It emphasises the importance of IDS researchers' self-reflexivity in terms of research paradigms when conducting qualitative research studies.

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## 要約

社会科学分野における研究は大きく定量的研究と定性的研究に二分できる。しかし、定性的研究は均一ではない。個々の研究が基礎におく哲学や方法論を注意深く見ていくと、様々な種類があることに気づく。全ての定性的研究が一つのパラダイムに基づくと考えることには無理がある。本稿は、社会科学分野におけるパラダイムに係る先行研究をレビューしつつ、定性的研究には複数のパラダイムが存在するという考えに基づき、定性的研究を評価するにあたっての4つの示唆を提示する。それらは、(1) 定性的研究では異なる評価基準を必要とする、(2) 研究者は自身の研究が基礎に置くパラダイムを明示しなければならない、(3) されど定性的研究においては、単一の評価基準を用いることが可能、そして(4) 定性的研究においては、評価基準を設定すること自体が非現実的だ、である。これらの4つの示唆は相容れないものだ。1番目と2番目の示唆は、異なる評価基準が必要であることを強調する。一方、3番目は単一の基準を提案し、4番目は評価そのものを否定する。この示唆の不適合性は、定性的研究において唯一の評価基準を確立することの難しさと定性的研究の多様性を示している。最後に本稿は、開発協力分野の研究者も、自身の研究がどのパラダイムに基礎を置くものかを常に意識することが重要である点を示唆する。

本稿の目的は開発援助の議論を広く紹介することにあります。本稿の掲載情報は信頼できると考えられる情報源から作成しており、作成には万全を期しておりますが、その正確性、完全性を保証するものではありません。詳しくは原論文をご参照下さい。また、記載された付加価値、政策含意や留意点は作成者個人の責任で執筆されており、作成者が属する組織の見解とは必ずしも一致していません。