

Module 2 Assignment

Critically evaluate a range of methodological approaches, research designs and research methods appropriate to gather data from complex work-based settings. Apply due consideration to research ethics and issues of insider research.

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Introduction

It has been said that there is no true reality in our existence, it is simply our interpretation of how things come to be and their effect on our lives (Mauthner, 2020). Another thought is that there is a true reality and all beings are based off of that one truth (Mauthner, 2020). These two ideals are different interpretations of reality called epistemology and ontology. Epistemology is a philosophical approach that dictates that our reality is how we perceive events and things based on our lived experiences also known as qualitative data (Ejnavarzala, 2019). Ontology is also a philosophical approach to reality however it focuses on quantitative data, conclusions developed from statistical research without the acknowledgment of emotional and social experiences (Ejnavarzala, 2019).

Analyzing my own perception of reality, I see how my interpretation is influenced by the relationship between quantitative data and qualitative data and acknowledging how statistical conclusions and social emotional experiences of others create nuanced results.

As an advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion, I recognize the realities of individuals leading lives that are different from my own. This mindset and mission has led me to research methods for incorporating inclusivity and compassion within the voice studio to help build a productive and healthy environment. This belief comes from my own personal experience and from the studies that amplify how an inclusive music education and positive musical performance experiences promote self expression, academic success and emotional intelligence (Váradi, 2022). In order to conduct research that provides well rounded, accurate results, I propose a combination of ontology and epistemology.

A mixed method use of epistemology and ontology can provide quantitative tangible evidence that I can use to further explore areas in my research that are influenced by societal, emotional, and cultural variables (Ejnavarzala, 2019). The conclusions produced by qualitative data can be supported by findings from quantitative data and vice versa, acting as a system of checks and balances (Takona, 2023). For example, by conducting semi structured surveys, subjects are provided with an opportunity to collect quantitative results as well as insight on the recipients' experience and opinions (Takona, 2023).

In order to ensure that my use of mixed methods of epistemological and ontological research maintains structure and credibility, I must explore and analyze different research methods and paradigms that have the potential to aid me in this process. I want to emphasize that while I am taking into consideration the lived experiences of others, it needs to be ensured that my bias does not interfere with my conclusions in a way that is unproductive.

Research Paradigms

When considering structures that will benefit my research process, I looked at research paradigms that have been used in the past to explore social justice and emotional issues. A research paradigm is a set research plan that takes into consideration specific methodologies and ideologies depending on the model (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

The first research paradigm I am looking into is **Constructivism**. This paradigm looks out how societal instances influence and construct one's perception of reality and how it creates realities that are molded to specific people (William, 2024). This influence comes from lived experiences and interactions with others. These interactions create conceived notions and ideals that are thought to be true (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Understanding how individuals are led to believe in their realities can allow us to know how their response to our research is influenced by their perception of life. Beyond that, the interpretivist side tends to seek out how these realities are then experienced by these individuals (William, 2024). With their knowledge and understanding of what reality is to them, they then proceed to make their decisions based off of those previously lived experiences. These informed decisions may not always be agreeable to all but they are what that individual believes to be true. Understanding their stance on issues within their thought process will allow us to see potential bias within their opinions and/or experience (Gillani, 2021).

The constructivism / interpretism paradigm provides advantages such as invaluable insight as well as being aware of biases within the responses of the research recipients. However, issues can occur involving the authors' own bias (Gillani, 2021). While conducting interviews and reviewing surveys, the author may find themselves having a difficult time separating their own beliefs with those found in their interview results. For instance, much of my interests surrounding vocal pedagogy involves technique supported by scientific evidence and diversity equity inclusionary practices. If I am asking about the topic of mental health or overall happiness within the studio, I may receive an anonymous response from a participant mentioning that they do not believe in the notion of mental health. While I may not agree with their stance, it is still valuable to my research and will provide an accurate view of my recipient pool. In order to combat this possible notion, I must remind myself that lived experiences are crucial to this research (Gillani, 2021).

My next paradigm is one that has deep roots in Marxism and has been altered through the years. **Critical theory** is a paradigm that is concentrated in promoting social justice and

advancing change by inspecting societal situations, power dynamics, and ideological influence (Person et al., 2020). Similar to our previous paradigms, critical theory sees the individual lived experience as an important component in the collection of research data. However, it looks more closely at how systems of power and society creates individuals living in certain situations and how to improve their quality of life (Garlitz & Zompetti, 2021). Critical theory is heavily influenced by the ideas of Marxism that involve equity and fighting against authoritarian regimes making critical theory not a politically neutral research paradigm as it aligns with progressive ideology (Person et al., 2020).

The progressive and social justice aspect to critical theory causes some controversy as it does possess some politically biased qualities (Garlitz & Zompetti, 2021), having said that, I believe it would enhance the quality of research surrounding power dynamics within the voice studio and how that dynamic is reflected in political atmospheres, parental relationships, and in educational settings like grade schools or universities (Person et al., 2020). A study that has the intention of seeking social justice would benefit from the use of critical theory as it prioritizes the lived experiences of those oppressed by authoritarian environments and social contracts.

When using critical theory, one must be aware that the credibility may be questioned (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). In order to combat this, dialectical reasoning must be incorporated into the post study data discussions to show an alternative perspective(s). Dialectical reasoning is a persuasive writing and argumentative technique used to provide alternate view points and acknowledging the values they hold (Stranier et al., 2001). Another critique of critical theory is that it can often be inaccessible to the very people it is trying to help (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Research that is done by institutions or scholars need to have academic language in order to be considered credible but many folks stuck in authoritarian settings often do not receive quality education and cannot understand the language being used (Tyson, 2023). The quality of education is often suppressed because authoritarian institutions know that knowledge brings change (Garlitz & Zompetti, 2021). To prevent the issue of inaccessibility, a debrief or an abstract in simpler terms can be provided to help others understand the information provided. Additionally, a glossary section can be provided as a reference point for those reading the results (Tyson, 2023).

Pragmatism is another paradigm that is used to further the movement of creating better situations like critical theory. Pragmatism is a research paradigm that prioritizes the collection of action based quantitative evidence through observation and focus groups while still acknowledging the socio-economical living situations (Capps 2023). However with pragmatism, there is less of an emphasis on the emotional effects caused by authoritarian regimes and more

on the practical issues it creates. Unlike its predecessors, pragmatism is a fairly recent paradigm that became popular during the late 1800s by John Dewey and is focused on action based evidence collection rather than a philosophical approach (Capps 2023). The little philosophy of pragmatism that remains is purely based on the idea that if something is true, it is true because it works (Capps 2023).

Pragmatism has much overlap with critical theory as they both hold the idea that educated and informed societies are able to resist authoritarian regimes. However, pragmatism lends itself to a more credible appearance to the eyes of those who may disagree with its results (Van Laar 2007). While other paradigms tend to favor numerical data and results rather than being influenced by emotional and social issues, pragmatism designs its collection methods to collect numerical data through a progressive lens (Morgan 2014). For example, a survey collecting statistical data may have the questions be specific to aspects of life influenced by socio-economic issues brought upon oppressive systems. In other words, pragmatic studies are able to provide the data needed to support their claims.

A possible issue from pragmatism is in the delivery of the data and research. If conducting research that is meant to create some form of empathy with the reader, it would be beneficial to share the data collected from the participants' interviews on their individual experiences (Van Laar 2007). By providing the stories of those involved, it may help emphasize that the data is not just numbers, but the experiences of real human beings (Gair 2011).

Research Designs

Research designs are different plans that dictate the goals and procedures for data collection and analysis (Siedlecki, 2020). These designs vary in how they utilize the interpretations of the participants and researches depending on the needs of the research design. For instance, some designs seek to document and create conclusions based on the personal reports of the participants while other designs want historical, cultural context behind the answers of the participants. The three research designs I am going to discuss recognize the importance of the perspectives of the participants and encourage the active adaptation and engagement from the researchers (Siedlecki, 2020).

Hermeneutics is a research design wanting to understand the historical, social, and cultural contextual influence behind the narratives of participants and making a calculated interpretation based off of the evidence provided (PV & K, 2020). This approach is to understand why texts discuss topics in a certain way or why someone would respond to a

question using specific language (Gunderson, 1967). Ultimately, it is to enrich the interpretation of the researcher and create conclusions from there.

Data collection for the Hermeneutics research design has a heavy influence from archeology, using evidence like historical texts and artifacts while still employing observations and interviews (George, 2025). The interviews conducted involve open-ended questions to promote an open conversation to get the required information and insight into the perspective and experience of the participant (George, 2025).

A constant flaw in qualitative research is the subjective matter and the hermeneutics design is no exception. The conclusions based on the interpretation of participant accounts, may be victim to bias and personal preference when it comes to the effort applied to the investigation of context (PV & K, 2020). The background research required to gain context from the accounts of participants is time consuming and extensive. Researchers may be likely to dive deeper into the accounts they find more interesting while ignoring the valid responses of other participants thus developing a more accurate interpretation of one account than another (Smith & Noble, 2014). Of course, this would make the validity of the conclusions and propositions offered by the study obsolete.

In order to avoid bias influencing the research process, boundaries must be created and maintained in regards to the relationship between the researcher and participant in addition to the relationship between the study content and the researcher (Sica, 2006). The boundaries defined with these relationships will help avoid giving special treatment to participant personality/content that agrees with the researcher and neglecting others (Malone et al., 2014).

Grounded theory is another research design that has a cycle process that goes between data collection and analysis. However with grounded theory, the goal is to create a research question or theory based off of the data collected from interviews and pre-existing research (Cho & Lee, 2014). The purpose is to not necessarily give a definitive answer and reassert any proposed answers, but to raise questions to help fill gaps in information or to create an original hypothesis.

Grounded theory contains all of the traditional aspects of a research approach including literature review, data collection, testing inquiries, and analysis however it only offers a hypothesis and does not have a conventional order of steps (Gunderson, 1967). Data collection and analysis processes are in a continuous cycle of informing and challenging each other. The findings offered from the textual evidence may be challenged by observations made or may inspire more questions requiring further investigation (Cho & Lee, 2014). Once a substantial amount of data has been collected, data with similarities can be grouped together by codes (PV

& K, 2020). The coding process is ever changing as the analysis and the data collection processes are able to rotate as needed. When the data collection and coding process has been completed, a final analysis can be done to develop a hypothesis.

The adaptability of the grounded theory research design has been criticized to be unstructured in its approach and possibly biased (Smith & Noble, 2014). Considering that the purpose of this model is to create an educated guess rather than to provide an answer, the flexibility provided validates the question if anything. This model's use of theoretical sampling demonstrates evidence based question development ensuring that the question offered had been through experimental stages, multiple drafts and extensive research(Cho & Lee, 2014). Any bias that may have influenced the research design and its hypothetical conclusion could only contribute to the interest and motivation of the researcher to create a compelling question rather than an answer (PV & K, 2020).

Action Research is a research design that encourages involvement from both the researcher and the participants (Checkland & Holwell, 1998). The goal is to collect the factual information in addition to the perspectives and the experiences of those participating in the study (Person et al., 2008). Action research differs from other designs that include the thoughts of the participants because of its collaborative nature, advocating for a democratic process that allows the participant to contribute to the adaptation of the study. The benefit of having insider contribution is finding practical solutions that have an immediate impact and can allow the researcher to make informed decisions in real time(Siedlecki, 2020).

The data collection phase of action research is similar to other research designs as it collects data from participants' personal accounts and experiences, textual evidence, and observations while simultaneously conducting fieldwork (PV & K, 2020). Being an inclusive and progressive design, it has been deemed by traditionalists as a design that lacks structure, parameters, and allows for bias (Naufel & Edwards, 2022). While these are risks, they can be avoided by planning on the part of the researcher by dictating what are strong ethical boundaries in the context of the study, establishing them with the participants beforehand and creating a system for data collection that documents and honors the stories of the participants but does not allow for bias to infiltrate the conclusions and validity of the study(Sica, 2006).

Hermeneutics, grounded theory, and action research all seem to have similar methods however there are slight nuanced differences between the three. They all highly regard the value of individual experiences but use those accounts in different ways such as using it to evaluate context, coding to define patterns, or to gain insight on how to best develop the study (Siedlecki, 2020).

Research Methods

Research methods are used as tools to collect and interpret data for the purpose of finding new information or uncovering patterns (Newcastle, 2025). In order to be utilized to their fullest potential, the selection of the method is dependent on the needs of the study. Methods have variables that affect the usefulness for a particular study i.e.: how data is to be collected, how participants are chosen, and how the evidence collected is analysed (Newcastle, 2025). So it is crucial to think about these variables before the method selection.

On the subject of participant selection for sampling, there are parameters to consider in order to create a data pool that will offer a substantial amount of data and reports. The two most basic options for sampling are whether the researcher will be using probability sampling or a non probability sampling method. A probability sampling chooses its participants at random in an attempt to create a pool that reflects the entire population (Siedlecki, 2020). This process helps to eliminate bias, however it can affect the usefulness of the data pool if it collects too many participants who are not related to the subject material enough. In contrast, non-probability sampling focuses on a specific population in order to gather information from participants who possess a particular insight on the subject matter (Smith & Noble, 2014).

The **focus group** research method uses a small pool of participants who have been coded together for the purpose of the sampling (Patten, 2016). The researcher is not necessarily involved in a collaborative process with the focus group but is in attendance in order to observe activities and facilitate group interviews (Hammarberg et al., 2016). In fact, **observation** is another research method that requires the researcher to take a step back from their direct involvement with the participants; however observation has no interference from the researcher whatsoever (Earley, 2013). The only time the observer interacts with the participant is during the debrief where the consent of their involvement and other essential information (Busetto et al., 2020).

Semi-structured interviews are used to obtain information specific to the interviewee (Siedlecki, 2020). The questions in these interviews are often fitted for that specific person and allow for them to elaborate their answer to provide context and permit a deeper understanding (Patten, 2016). In view of the fact that semi-structured interviews have a tendency to go in unexpected directions, the researcher creates a guide for the interview process for themselves to facilitate the interview in a way that is structured but still allows for conversation and proper observation (Siedlecki, 2020). A shortcoming that semi-structured interviews hold is the difficulty

of coding and categorizing information and the creation of statistical data as the responses provided will have an array of complicated responses (Patten, 2016).

If statistical data needs to take precedence over qualitative data, the use of **open-ended questions** is a similar alternative that can provide the participants elaboration while being formatted in order to be easily categorized (Patten, 2016). Open-ended questions are used to conduct structured interviews that record the immediate answer of the participant with space for them to clarify or provide context to their response (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This format maintains the benefits offered by semi-structured interviews and has the ability to categorize and code the results (Patten, 2016).

The different methods that can be used for the analysis and the collection of data share a belief in that the researchers' ability to maintain and follow a structure for themselves is of utmost importance (Earley, 2013). Some methods require this structured format to go beyond the researchers' work and into the questionnaires and interview process with the participants but some kind of plan is still maintained even with adaptable variables (Earley, 2013). The selection process of these methods are not a question of validity, but rather the accuracy they would provide to a specific study (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

Conclusion

The different paradigms, designs, and methods surrounding research help to create research processes that are structured, viable, and realistic. Some may incorporate the participants involvement more than others however participant involvement on all levels requires a critical evaluation of the ethics surrounding the research process.

When research involves the stories and studies of humans and other living beings, it is critical that all possible ethical dilemmas and possibilities are considered and analyzed. **Ethics** is the examination of what behavior and conduct is to be considered as moral or immoral (Arifin, 2018). Although morality is not consistent between all religions and cultures entirely, it usually entails the belief in respect, privacy, and consent (Naufel & Edwards, 2022).

Keeping these basic rights of the participants in mind, ethics must be constantly at the forefront of any decision made during the construction of and during the research process. Some questions to think about while designing the approach to the research are including but not limited to; the age group of the participants, their legal and moral ability to consent to their involvement in the study, their safety, their environment, the emotional, mental, and physical impact of the study, and the power dynamic relationship between the participant and the

researcher (Arifin, 2018). These are factors to contemplate before, during, and after the data collection process and during the analysis and commentary review.

When considering ethics, it is important to acknowledge any potential bias held by the researcher that would cause them to overlook specific ethical plot points (Sica, 2006). This phenomenon is called **motivational blindness**¹ (McComb, 2025). Motivational blindness is usually an unconscious self-serving bias that influences what we learn about and how (McComb, 2025). The issue with this behavior is that it can cause the researcher to not only overlook potential threats to the participants but could encourage them instead (McComb, 2025). This is another aspect to keep in mind when evaluating ethics.

Once ethical considerations have been made and analyzed, they must be debriefed to the potential participants confidently and verbally with the participants and with possible guardians who need to be present for minors (Bos et al., 2012). The conditions of the research observation and data collection process must be described clearly and accessibly to ensure that those providing appropriate consent are able to understand what may occur and possible outcomes, both positive and negative (Dufrene & Young, 2014). If agreed to, the consent forms need to be stored confidently and safely to avoid a breach of personal information and data to ensure the safety of both participants and the researcher (Dufrene & Young, 2014).

Analyzing the benefits and risks of potential and possible paradigms, methods, and designs are important to the research development process but the deliberation of ethical contingency must be taken at every step. If the research has a goal of helping fellow human beings, then the data collection and analysis should reflect the ethical standards that the research anticipates to promote (Naufel & Edwards, 2022).

¹ The author would like to acknowledge that the term “motivational blindness” has ableist implications.

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