

A brief overview of research paradigms

Types of research:

Qualitative research: primarily used in social sciences, interested in experiences and meanings. Tends to recognise the subjectivity of the researcher. Uses methods such as interviews,

Quantitative research: considers statistical and quantifiable data and seeks to be objective. Uses methods such as surveys, questionnaires etc.

Mixed methods research: combines both qualitative and quantitative data, e.g., may use a questionnaire to gather statistical data and then interview participants to understand the statistics better.

Research paradigm comprises of the following:

Ontology relates to the question of reality (Waring, 2012), e.g., what is reality?

Epistemology provides a means to know or understand that reality (Waring, 2012).

Theoretical Perspective: The 'lens' through which you understand/analyse the data, e.g., Feminism, Queer Theory, Critical Race Theory, Critical Disability Studies, Symbolic Interactionism etc.

Methodology: The procedure you use to gather the data, e.g., Autoethnography, Critical Ethnography, Narrative Inquiry, Phenomenology

Methods: The tools you use to gather data, e.g., interviewing, surveys, observation, focus group, journals etc.

For example, a qualitative research paradigm may comprise of:

- **Research topic:** An exploration of women's lived experiences of parenting during the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - **Ontology** (what is reality?): Constructivist i.e., there is no single reality or truth.
 - **Epistemology** (what and how can I know the reality/knowledge?): Interpretivist i.e., because there is no single reality or truth, reality needs to be interpreted.
 - **Axiology:** Social justice
 - **Theoretical Perspective:** Feminism
 - **Methodology** (the procedure): Narrative inquiry and researcher reflexivity
 - **Methods** (the tools): Unstructured interviews & data analysis using thematic analysis.

Remember: research ethics are prioritised and woven throughout the research process.

Paradigm	Ontology <i>What is reality?</i>	Epistemology <i>How can I know reality?</i>	Theoretical Perspective <i>Which approach do you use to know something?</i>	Methodology <i>How do you go about finding out?</i>	Method <i>What techniques do you use to find out?</i>
Positivism	There is a single reality or truth (more realist).	Reality can be measured and hence the focus is on reliable and valid tools to obtain that.	Positivism Post-positivism	Experimental research Survey research	Usually quantitative, could include: Sampling Measurement and scaling Statistical analysis Questionnaire Focus group Interview
Constructivist / Interpretive	There is no single reality or truth. Reality is created by individuals in groups (less realist).	Therefore, reality needs to be interpreted. It is used to discover the underlying meaning of events and activities.	Interpretivism (reality needs to be interpreted) • Phenomenology • Symbolic interactionism • Hermeneutics Critical Inquiry Feminism	Ethnography Grounded Theory Phenomenological research Heuristic inquiry Action Research Discourse Analysis Feminist Standpoint research etc	Usually qualitative, could include: Qualitative interview Observation Participant Non participant Case study Life history Narrative Theme identification etc
Pragmatism	Reality is constantly renegotiated, debated, interpreted in light of its usefulness in new unpredictable situations.	The best method is one that solves problems. Finding out is the means, change is the underlying aim.	Deweyan pragmatism <i>Research through design</i>	Mixed methods Design-based research Action research	Combination of any of the above and more, such as data mining expert review, usability testing, physical prototype
Subjectivism	Reality is what we perceive to be real	All knowledge is purely a matter of perspective.	Postmodernism Structuralism Post-structuralism	Discourse theory Archaeology Genealogy Deconstruction etc.	Autoethnography Semiotics Literary analysis Pastiche Intertextuality etc.
Critical	Realities are socially constructed entities that are under constant internal influence.	Reality and knowledge is both socially constructed and influenced by power relations from within society	Marxism Queer theory feminism	critical discourse analysis, critical ethnography action research ideology critique	Ideological review Civil actions open-ended interviews, focus groups, open-ended questionnaires, open-ended observations, and journals.

(Patel, 2015)

Patel, S. (2015) *The research paradigm – methodology, epistemology and ontology – explained in simple language*. (Online)

Available at: <http://salmapatel.co.uk/academia/the-research-paradigm-methodology-epistemology-and-ontology-explained-in-simple-language> [Accessed: 07/02/2018]

Waring, M. (2012) Finding your theoretical position, in, Arthur, J., Waring, M., Coe, R., and Hedges, L.V. (eds.) *Research Methods & Methodologies in Education*. London: Sage.