

# THE EXPERIENCES WITH QUALITATIVE VALIDITY IN A CLASSROOM RESEARCH: ISSUES PERTAINING TO VALUE CLAIMS

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**ABSTRACT:** *In this paper, the writer calls into question the yet to be resolved epistemological issues about the way researchers make value claims in support of the authenticity of their research discoveries. The writer offers recognition to existing paradigmatic duality as a necessity for the third wave expressed by proponents of triangulation. Such dichotomy offers room for continuous divergence of opinions on the ways researchers perceive the empirical social world. The paper supports ongoing argument that any discussion of the criteria for judging social and educational research findings must confront the issue of relativism. This position resonates through the writer's encounter and experience with qualitative validity during a classroom study. The conclusion drawn through this encounter is that a research design is not made valid or reliable by the user's ability to apply many verbose or exoteric terms. Instead such claim is made by the meanings, which the designs and the final report make to those for whom the study is conducted in terms of policy and practice.*

**KEY WORDS:** *epistemology, quantitative methods, qualitative research, validity, reliability, and generalisability.*

## INTRODUCTION

To argue that qualitatively designed studies fall short of producing valid, reliable and replicable findings is to suggest a denial of the qualitative epistemology. Ongoing debates about whether qualitative studies are capable of producing good knowledge centre on the non-application of statistical apparatuses in the conduct of such research (Creswell, 2003; Smith & Deemer, 2003; and Henning, 2004). It would appear much of the argument, particularly within sub-Saharan Africa, in support of the quantitative value claims hinge on the researchers' proficiency in the use of statistical tools, which do not necessarily lend support for use by qualitative

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researchers. However, the question, which resonates from such argument, is whether statistical tools possess any investigative quality and whether such tools are capable to add values, which do not inherently exist within the body of such data.

The position of this paper is that statistical tools do not possess any investigative quality capable to discover hidden knowledge. What strength such tools do possess, however, is analytical whereby numerical and calculative meanings are imputed to already assembled data resulting from a concluded fieldwork. Again such tools do not uncover beyond that which the data-collecting techniques had offered during the course of a particular fieldwork. Like the sorting and the coding processes commonly used in qualitative research, statistical tools ensure that some order may be brought to otherwise highly voluminous set of data. However, while the qualitative researcher applies the interpretivist narration to assign meanings to sorted and coded data, statistical tools offer the quantitative researcher the impetus to assign meanings to quantitative data by drawing inferences from sample to population.

It is the argument of this paper that this process, whether it be quantitative or qualitative, does not uncover beyond the strength of the data-collecting instrument. That is why E. Henning had earlier argued, “the function of a research design is to ensure that evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible [...], which will be the basis on which knowledge claims will be made” (Henning, 2004:146).

One other issue, which has made some import in this paper, borders on what appears to be an overly quantitative claims of the infallibility of human judgment. The argument has always been that quantitative researchers rely on well-established schemata (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Wainwright, 1997; and Bryman & Bell, 2007). The argument also maintains that qualitative researchers, rely on their interpretive strengths, often deeply and subjectively biased (Winter, 2000; and Creswell, 2003). However, this writer argues nothing exist in knowledge that is not a product of human judgment, theoretically as well as practically. The writer concurs with G. Rolfe argument that “quality judgments entail a subjective reading of the research text, and the responsibility for appraising research lies with the reader than with the writer of the research report; with the consumer rather than with the researchers themselves” (Rolfe, 2006:309). The point being made here is that the process – through which validity as a research principle is reached – is always and necessarily based on human judgment, which can not be exclusively immune to falsifications. This sort of argument appears to dominate research enterprise in recent years with the result that most research reports appear unnecessarily and overly statistical irrespective of the often questionable level of statistical expertise among the users. This is an account of this writer’s experiences of qualitative validity during a classroom study.

#### **THE QUALITATIVE-QUANTITATIVE DIVERGENCE AS EPISTEMOLOGICAL REQUISITE FOR CHOICE**

To argue as did G. Rolfe that “any attempt to establish a consensus on 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, 2006:305) was inappropriate. Such theorizing appears to be informed by either a lack of history of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of science, which partly informed the foundation of research methodologies or an abject non-recognition of an existing functional paradigm. This author argues that it is neither the existence of a unified theory nor even the scrupulous application of such theory that made quantitative research generally acceptable. Rather, quantitative methodologies derive such perceived unity from their susceptibility to statistical manipulations. However, this author offers recognition to existing paradigmatic duality as a necessity for the third wave expressed by proponents of triangulation. Such dichotomy offers room for continuous divergence of opinions on the ways researchers perceive the empirical social world.

The quantitative research is defined as “an objective, formal, systematic process in which numerical data are used to quantify or measure phenomena and produce findings” (Carr, 1994:716). One major aim of quantitative research is the testing of theories a priori from which predictive statements are made. It is a type of research that is designed for the testing, description and examination of variables with attempts at establishing the interconnectedness between their causes and effects. Quantitative research method neither measures the historical processes nor does it measure the cultural contexts within which a particular research is conducted (Carney, Joiner & Tragou, 1997). On the other hand, qualitative research is a “form of research activity that relies on the use of unstructured and semi-structured forms of data collection techniques and represents the outcome of these activities using verbal descriptions specially designed for the purpose” (Okeke & Ume, 2004a:165).

The word “qualitative” implies an emphasis or recognition of the processes and meanings that are not easily susceptible to measurement in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency (Carney, Joiner & Tragou, 1997). Its emphasis is on capturing or obtaining in-depth understanding of the participants’ actions in a particular study (Wainwright, 1997). In this context, C. Glesne & A. Peshkin conceive qualitative research to mean all forms of research that are linked with the humanistic or interpretive approaches including phenomenology, ethnography, ethno-methodology, heuristics and hermeneutics, among others (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). To deny knowledge of such collective theory, which found expressions in humanism or interpretivism as did G. Rolfe (2006) is to argue same for quantitative research. It is the same as arguing that the application of experimental, quasi-experimental and the survey research approaches; variations of quantitative research, also inhibit any attempt to collectively pin such approaches to any body of theory or methodology.

Studies have shown that research methodologies have history, which dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century’s philosophy of science. It is imperative for those entering the research field to acquaint themselves with this history because it would appear that ongoing argument, which borders on value claims among researchers, is partly explained by this lack of history. For instance, positivism according to H. Brink “is the paradigm or philosophical perspective, which underlies the quantitative approach

[...] in which reductionism, quantifiability, objectivity and operationalization are essential” (Brink, 1991:14). As a philosophical current, positivism was first made prominent in the works of the French philosopher, Auguste Comte (Haack, 1995) and ever since its discovery; positivism has metamorphosed into three stages including logical positivism, logical empiricism and *empirio-criticism* (Haack, 1995; and Murzi, 2001). However, of these three stages, it would appear only logical positivism, had directly imparted on the establishment of the quantitative approach to research.

For example, logical positivists perceive experience as the only judge of scientific knowledge; arguing that knowledge is meaningful only if it has been proven by means of experience, positivists note that metaphysical conjectures are completely forbidden. The goal of research is simply to describe the phenomena as they are experienced and the purpose of science is simply to stick to what are observable and measurable. Knowledge of anything beyond that, a positivist would argue, is impossible (Trochim, 2002). Thus, having positioned itself as a total rejection of metaphysics, the argument in positivism is that observation alone cannot lead to the discovery of universal laws concerning a particular phenomenon even though it argues valid knowledge may result from such observation. Observation, according to logical positivism (Murzi, 2001; and Trochim, 2002), must be backed by reason, conjectures and theories regarding their forms. This calls for the *hypothetico-deductive* approach to social inquiry.

So, therefore, the positivists retained from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of science on the idea of the natural laws. Following this, positivists will then argue that the central aim of research is to discover universal laws. They also retained from this philosophical tradition, the idea that science is the only true source of legitimate knowledge (Hammersley, 1989). It would appear this mode of conception influenced the positivists’ application of methods used within natural sciences. Again, it would appear this philosophical tradition also influenced the quantitative and statistical representation of data from the empirical social world. To get on with research, the positivist would argue what the researcher requires is “knowledge of the previous research and of statistics” (Mennell, 1977:1) and such is the tradition, which deeply influenced the conduct of research well into the 1950s and 1960s (Ward, 1999; and Wildy, 1999).

The positivist researchers, therefore, concern themselves with the discovery of universal laws governing society. Human actions are then perceived in relation to these laws and consequently human beings are pictured as acting in accordance with the dictates of these laws. Researchers within such philosophical orientation rely on controlled and systematic observation of its subject matter as well as on systematic collection and analysis of data (Okolocha, Nwanunobi & Igbo, 1999). It is this type of orientation that guides the positivists’ conduct of research and during this process “persons or events are broken down into discrete parts for study; these discrete parts are directly observable units with behaviour that is separate from and unaffected by the observer” (Brink, 1991:14).

However, humanist researchers dismiss the positivists' assumptions as speculative and seek to humanize the process of social inquiry (Brink, 1991; and Jones, 1997). Humanist researchers include those oriented within the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of science, which found expressions in historicism, neo-Kantianism and the American pragmatism (Gwinn, Norton & Goetz, 1987; Hammersley, 1989; Haack, 1995; and Ritzer, 1996). Historicists argue that human life is so diversified and, as such the positivists' physical expressions of it, is highly inappropriate for the understanding of these diversified forms of life.

However, historicists argue what is required to understand such varied forms of life is a deeper investigation of the underlying meanings in order to uncover the distinctive cultural dynamics from which such forms of life have evolved (Brink, 1991; and Jones, 1997). On the other hand, neo-Kantian researchers reject the idea of natural sciences as the only source of legitimate knowledge while arguing that observers operating within the social and physical world can only do so through differential values (Gwinn, Norton & Goetz, 1987). Pragmatism is a combination of two main tendencies: "the belief that experience is the starting point and terminus for all knowledge; and (second) the idea that human must be understood as part of the natural world" (Hammersley, 1989:45).

Taken jointly, the central theme in the humanists' epistemology is the understanding of the distinctive nature of human social interactions. It is important to note that such epistemology was very influential to the development of what is today regarded within research parlance as the qualitative approach. For in qualitative research "there is attention to the social context in which events occur and have meaning, and there is emphasis on understanding the social world from the point of view of the participants in it" (Brink, 1991:14). It is thus wrong to argue as did G. Rolfe that no such thing exists in form of unified body of theory, methodology or method that can collectively be described as qualitative research (Rolfe, 2006). Rather, it would seem qualitative research found itself in the present state of "unacceptability" because of what appears to be lack of self confidence and trust among qualitative researchers. Moreover, qualitative methodologies' non-susceptibility to statistical quantification and manipulation also account for the reason why this research paradigm is still being treated as second-rate. What is more?

What is important in every research process is the demonstration of rigor through a well documented and verifiable proof. Quantitative researchers are able to demonstrate such proof of statistical rigor through their "ability to operationalize them in such a way that numbers can be attributed to them" (Liebscher, 1998:670). However, there is little or no evidence to support, as noted by T. Greenhalgh and R. Taylor (1997), the well known fact that one couple in ten is infertile or that one man in ten is homosexual yet most of us accept as truth so long as such statements contain numbers in support. It is also important to note that qualitative researchers are not easily susceptible to applying such numerical evidence to strengthen their claims. Nonetheless, instead of demonstrating how they will or have achieved rigor in the body of their research report, some qualitative researchers have laboriously argued that validity and reliability cannot be achieved in qualitative research (Morse

*et al.*, 2002). This is the missing link. The rest of this paper tells the story of this author's experiences with qualitative validity during a classroom research.

### THE RESEARCH SETTING

It was between 2001 and 2003 when this writer undertook a study for the award of a doctorate. The larger study was aimed to make the qualitative research paradigm more acceptable within the Nigerian research tradition and thus, it was meant to be a demonstration study captioned "the gendered perception of schooling amongst secondary school students". The study was an observational single case study research design. This writer was aware of other types of case studies including the oral history, situational analysis, clinical and multi-case (Tellis, 1997; and Osuala, 2001) but the observational single case study was the one that suited the purposes of the study. It must be noted that a case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed. This writer was interested in understanding the in-depth immanent meanings the participants of his study made out of their understanding and interpretations of schooling. It was for this reason that the observational single case presented the opportunity for a micro-approach to the study of the gendered perception of schooling through a particular group of students within the chosen school. Such design ensured that detailed viewpoints of the participants were brought to the fore using multiple methods.

Moreover, a single case can represent a significant contribution to theory building and assist in refocusing the direction of future investigation in the area. It was in this understanding that this writer also found one of the strengths of the knowledge claims because "validity asks [...] the question whether, by using certain methods, we are investigating what we say we are investigating" (Henning, 2004:147). In addition, it was the use of the observational single case, which allowed this writer to engage multi-data eliciting technique during the fieldwork. More so, this writer was aware that "engaging multiple methods such as observation, interviews and recordings, will lead to more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities" (Golafshani, 2003:604). This practice is in line with what B. Brock-Utne (1998) refers to as convergent validity, which argues that one of the conventional ways of ensuring validity in qualitative studies is the recourse to triangulation. The idea of convergent validity therefore entails that adopting different methods when studying same construct should give relatively high inter-correlation. In addition, J.W. Creswell and D.L. Miller suggest triangulation to be "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000:126).

The study took place in one of the community secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State of Nigeria. The school was located along the Nsukka end of the Nsukka-Enugu Road, not very far away from the popular Opi junction. A number of reasons informed the selection of the school for study. *First*, the location of the school along a major express highway exposed the school to all sorts of social dynamics. Students in the school were likely to be susceptible to all

kinds of influences. *Second*, preliminary investigation showed that the school had a history of persistent lateness to school amongst the student population. Absenteeism was also a problem within the school. *Third*, the population of the school also added to the appropriateness of the school as a study site. It was a co-educational type and that made it easier for gender studies to be located within.

Knowledge of these dynamics, which were contingent upon the study site, ensured that openness was maintained throughout the period the study lasted. It is this type of reflexive subjectivity (McCotter, 2001) that informed this writer to document clearly the assumptions that have influenced the research process. These influences were made manifest during data collection and that made the task of achieving validity much easier. This process was continuous until the research report was written and it is believed this type of reflexivity would enable “reader to evaluate the appropriateness of [this writer’s] influence” (Turnock & Gibson, 2001:472) and other dynamics upon the research process.

Meanwhile preceding the presentation of the proposal for the larger study to the proposal committee, the methodology chapter was put through the test of verification. This is one important process of checking, confirming, making sure as well as being certain about the research strategies (Morse *et al.*, 2002). In line with this, the entire methodology chapter was sent to two separate qualitative research experts: Professor Stephen Lerman of London South Bank University, Britain; and Suzanne McCotter of the Millersville University, Pennsylvania, United States. This exercise was also in line with J.W. Creswell’s “use of external auditor to review the entire project” (Creswell, 2003:196) and one advantage gained from allowing the research design pass through verification process was that it helped the researcher modify the research processes. Getting the qualitative experts read through the design components of the study enhanced the process of rigor which also guaranteed validity because in qualitative research to validate is to investigate, to check, to question, and to theorize.

The sample of the study was made-up of fifty (50) senior secondary school students of equal number of boys and girls. This was in line with the design of the study, which emphasized micro but detailed understanding of the phenomenon under study. However, with the sample identified, ethical issues were quickly addressed. Participants were informed of the purposes of the study and that the study was to last for a whole school term beginning from September 16 to December 13, 2002. The participants were also informed that in the course of the study, certain issues were to be discussed, some of which were to touch on their private lives. But participants were also informed that all efforts were to be made to avoid being intrusive on the part of the researcher. Moreover, participants were equally advised on their rights to withdraw from the study whenever they so desired. Most importantly, participants were informed that should any part of the information resulting from the study be published, efforts would be made to protect their identities where the release of such information would be injurious to the participants’ integrity. Following these, consent forms were issued to the fifty participants in the study to which they all signed. Again this was partly in congruence with the principles

of catalytic validity (Brock-Utne, 1998; and McCotter, 2001) which demands some documentation that the respondents were vigorously involved in the research process.

The principle of triangulation directed the process of data collection. Four methods were used during the collection of data and these included observations, interviews, focus group discussions and the participants' diaries. This researcher also supported these methods with a still camera and a personal diary. It must be noted that observation became necessary in the study because this researcher was interested in describing the behaviour of the individuals in the study. It therefore became imperative for the participants to be studied within their natural setting. Triangulation was necessary in the study in order to overcome the problems associated with method bounded-ness (Wildy, 1999) and the need to achieve internal validity. The internal validity of a study demonstrates how correct the research portrays the phenomena it is supposed to portray (Brock-Utne, 1998). Again internal validity, which in qualitative paradigm is replaced with the concept of credibility, involves establishing that the result of one's research study is believable from the point of view of the participants (Trochim, 2006). One way the researcher undertook this exercise was to take the final report back to the participants in the study.

Under the principle of participant observation, it was agreed with the authorities of the chosen school that this researcher was to teach the class from where the sample for the study was drawn. Consequently, this researcher chose history and taught the subject throughout the period of the fieldwork. Data collection therefore began in form of participant observation in which this researcher was the sole collector of the data that formed part of the study. Observation started on the September 16 and lasted until December 13, 2002. This was a prolonged period of stay on the field lasting for sixty-two (62) days, which made one academic term.

J.W. Creswell has identified prolonged period on the field as one of the primary strategies for achieving qualitative validity (Creswell, 2003). Space does not allow mention to be made of various items that guided the observational activities in this article. However, observation usually started from the assembly and then moved to the classroom vicinity of the chosen study group. While in the school, participants were systematically followed during class lessons in various subjects, during break times, manual labour and at all other times until the closing time. During observation, this researcher recorded all behavioural attributes displayed by participants in the study. At the end of every observation, the researcher transcribed all observed and recorded items into a descriptive whole. This exercise marked the beginning of the initial analysis, which helped in the establishment of the analytical themes used in the final analysis. It was in this way that the observational instrument aided the collection of data.

The interview instrument was adopted with the understanding that it has the ability to elicit information that may not easily be accessible through other means (Elliott, 1997). Moreover, this researcher was aware of the fact that when allowed to answer in their own words, the interview instrument was capable to bring out the qualitatively hidden and varied differences within the participants' interactions (Horn, 1998; and Liebscher, 1998). The interview was unstructured and covered



sixteen (16) areas including participants' attitudes, likes and approaches to schooling, and these were put to the participants in question forms. Interviews took place at the library of the chosen school between September 30 and November 19, 2002. Each interview lasted about forty (40) minutes from 10:30 to 11:40 am each day and two participants were interviewed on each day. The tape recorder was used during the process of interviewing and, while the participants responded to the questions, their responses were tape-recorded. At the end of each interview session, responses were transcribed into data.

The focus group discussions were partly influenced by emerging issues from both the researcher's observations and the interviews. Three sessions of discussions were held with the participants of the study. The first was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, followed by another on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2002. The third and final session of the discussion was held on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November same year. Each of the focus group discussions lasted for a period of sixty (60) minutes. The method adopted during group discussions was to introduce the topic or issue and while participants engaged themselves, this researcher simply acted as moderator as well as recording the speeches. The tape-recorder was also used during the process of discussion and participants' speeches were later transcribed by the researcher. One important benefit derived from the use of FGD (Focus Group Discussion) was that it enabled the researcher clarify some of the issues raised during the interviews. Particularly the adoption of the FGD offered a deeper understanding of the participants' feelings over issues as they struggled to make sense of the issues in focus.

It is for this reason that C. Gill argues one advantage of focus group lies in the nature of the material it gives access to. The FGD also helped the researcher confirm the credibility of some of the issues raised during individual interviews (Gill, 1998). This is what B. Brock-Utne refers to as instrumental or criterion validity demonstrated by a researcher by showing that data generated through a particular instrument can match those resulting from alternative instrument(s) used in the same study (Brock-Utne, 1998). While the focus group discussion was used as a supporting method, the adoption of the diary was informed by the understanding that only diaries will enable researchers access phenomena, which were not amenable to observation and discussions because they were unfocused or occurred outside set time or environmental boundaries, and were likely to be altered by the presence of an observer (Elliott, 1997).

Data were collected through the participants' diaries in two stages. The first stage concentrated mainly on eliciting information on the participants' social as well as cultural background. The second stage of the diary exercise aimed at eliciting information on the nature of the participants' activities outside the official school period. The diary exercise lasted from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> November 2002. The diary was unstructured but also required the participants to document as sincerely as they wished all activities that occurred within their lives from the moment they left the school premises until they returned to school the following day. This exercise lasted for seven days and every participant took part in the diary exercise. Diaries were also taken home since information from such a document was supposed to have

been influenced by events which took place within spaces that were outside the official time boundaries. Taken jointly, one important advantage gained from the triangulated approach to data collection was that “engaging multiple methods [...] lead to more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities” from the participants in the study (Golafshani, 2003:604).

The use of pseudonym in place of the participants’ real identities was necessitated by the nature of thick, rich description of the research report. Studies have identified both the use of thick, rich description and member-checking as strategies for achieving validity (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997; Brock-Utne, 1998; Creswell, 2003; and Smith & Deemer, 2003). Participants in the study were given the opportunity to read through the report of the study as one way of ensuring the study actually investigated what it intended to investigate. The use of “member-checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report back to participants” is seen by J.W. Creswell as a good strategy for achieving validity (Creswell, 2003:196).

## DISCUSSIONS

When evaluating the usefulness of any research outcomes, it is important to note both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms have different reasons for researching the social world thereby necessitating differential findings. For instance, one visualizes the social world in terms of variables seeking causal correlations; the other visualizes the social world in terms of phenomena and seeks understanding of the immanent meanings that inform actions within human interactional situations. It must be noted that “unlike quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, prediction and generalization of findings; qualitative researchers seek instead illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar situations” (Golafshani, 2003:600). Consequently, the assessment of their findings insofar as such findings result from processes informed by differential rationale, calls for differential criteria for doing so.

The quantitative researcher begins his/her research activity “by [...] identifying the variables inherent in the problem to be investigated, pose relevant questions and state testable hypotheses, develop a design appropriate for the investigation, carry out some treatment and no treatment conditions, collect data, and interpret and report them” (Ochuhe & Anyanwu eds., 1990:22). Such an approach emphasizes quantity and its significance derives from the researcher’s ability to represent in numerical forms, any emerging analysis and interpretation from the data. By employing such instruments as the descriptive and inferential statistics, such a researcher is able to reproduce a well-ordered representation of the entire research process sometimes mostly through the help of a computer machine. It is through this process that such a researcher is able to leave behind, a well-ordered and documented process that is always taken-for-granted (Hammersley, 1989). Moreover, because such process is always and necessarily replicable based on the availability of numbers, such procedure is constantly being counted as valid.

This of course is not the way of the qualitative researcher. The rationale for conducting qualitative research is to explore the emic aspects of the individuals' everyday lives and not to search for truth. This was exactly the case with this researcher's study of the "gendered perception of schooling". For this purpose, emphasis is always and necessarily not on the reproduction of a representative sample of a given population. The qualitative researcher is interested in a deeper understanding of the social phenomenon and not in the uncovering of any existing truth. Accordingly, H. Wildy argues that in as much as validity represents the truth claim, no such thing exist in concrete terms. She further states that no such thing as truth exists anywhere and therefore no such truth is waiting out there to be captured by researchers. She therefore concludes "reality is constructed by people as they attempt to make sense of their experiences" (Wildy, 1999:69). The validity of such exercise rest not with any academic research committee rather such value claims must necessarily rest with the users of the research finding. Moreover, "validity comes from being able to get your ideas accepted in the discourse community [...] to open them to possible falsification [...] also to publish them for even broader communication" (Henning, 2004:149).

Earlier, B. Brock-Utne differentiates six forms of qualitative validity through which studies that are qualitatively designed must be assessed (Brock-Utne, 1998). Such forms included apparent validity; instrumental or pragmatic validity; construct validity; internal validity; external validity; and catalytic validity. When doing qualitative study, J.W. Creswell notes "validity is discussed in terms of trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility" (Creswell, 2003:196). J.W. Creswell also notes certain strategies including triangulation, member-checking, thick description, use of external auditor, which must be adopted in qualitative research in order to achieve validity (Creswell, 2003). When researchers are concerned about improving the validity of their study, it is imperative to indicate the roles of the self in the process of such study. By so doing, readers and users of the outcome of such study are enabled to make appropriate decisions on value claims. This is what C. Turnock & V. Gibson refer to as reflexive validity "whereby articulation of the researchers' influences on a study enables the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of their influence" (Turnock & Gibson, 2001:472). Of course as already noted, S.S. McCotter (2001) refers to it as reflexive subjectivity.

To reiterate, it has to be noted that qualitative research arose out of post-positivists' refusal to accept the concept of a single static or objective truth. That is why G. Winter indicates that one's notion of truth determines one's definition of accurate representation (Winter, 2000). That is why J.K. Smith and D.K. Deemer argue "any discussion of criteria for judging social and educational inquiry must confront the issue of relativism" (Smith & Deemer, 2003:429). Such argument would, therefore, support the notion that there is no generally valid and objective knowledge. Rather, J.K. Smith and D.K. Deemer would argue that all knowledge comes from a particular perspective and consequently, the validity of such knowledge is relative to that particular perspective (Smith & Deemer, 2003). Therefore, whether or not validity is essentially the same concept in qualitative and quantitative research,

it would appear evident that the means by which such value claim is to be achieved are different for each methodology. Both J. Hupcey (2002) and A. Smaling (2003) also emphasize the need for researchers and evaluators to look for, as well as strive to maintain the methodological difference within the distinct approaches to social inquiry.

Following this, some writers have attempted to replace reliability and validity with concepts, which appear to satisfy the evaluation of the kind of findings coming from qualitative research enterprises. According to J.M. Morse *et al.*, reliability and validity are substituted with the parallel concepts of trustworthiness, which contains four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. According to J.M. Morse *et al.* also within these concepts were specific methodological strategies for demonstrating qualitative rigor. They include audit trail, member checks, confirming results with participants, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, structural corroboration and referential material adequacy (Morse *et al.*, 2002).

According to N. Golafshani, the concepts of reliability and validity in quantitative research connote two types of interpretations, “*firstly*, with regards to reliability, whether the result is replicable. *Secondly*, with regards to validity, whether the means of measurement are accurate and whether they are actually measuring what they are intended to measure” (Golafshani, 2003:599). Also N. Golafshani argues that such definitions appear inadequate for use in qualitative studies noting that “reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in qualitative paradigm” (Golafshani, 2003:604).

It is further argued that the importation of the quantitative conceptualization of generalization of research findings into the qualitative research operations appears inappropriate (McCotter, 2001; Hupcey, 2002; Trochim, 2002; Golafshani, 2003; and Smaling, 2003). The concept of generalization of research findings portrays the notion that everything in life is constant and unchanging. Such perception of human social activities has deeply informed the quantitative researchers’ application of such techniques as manipulation and control of variables during a particular data collection fieldwork. But human beings are always in constant state of flux. This means human behaviour is neither static nor fixed, rather human behaviour is fluid and ever-changing. This is in line with B. Ward’s claims that “the meaning of each thing concrete or abstract is not fixed [...]. It is constantly changing [...] and because we are in constant engagement with the world, meaning is constantly being modified if not completely changed” (Ward, 1999:54). Qualitative research processes are grounded in the observation of phenomena in a real world that is in a constant state of flux. Such processes equally take place in a situation that is specific in time and space and as a result, cannot be generalized to a different context. By so doing, the aim of qualitative research stands defeated.

So what then is generalization in qualitative research? A number of scholars have attempted to provide an answer to the above question (Chenail, 1995; Turner, 2001; and Smaling, 2003). However, the word transferability appears to be in congruence with the aim of qualitative research. Accordingly, A. Smaling argues

that in qualitative research, generalization is replaced with transferability. As an aspect of communicative generalization, A. Smaling maintains transferability remains the only replacement for the traditional external validity otherwise known as research generalisability. Explaining further, A. Smaling argues transferability is implicitly based on analogical reasoning (Smaling, 2003). The fact of the matter is that the reader of the research report, not the researcher or the supervising committee, who determines whether analogies exist in the report. The reader must have an adequate knowledge of the researched situation so that he/she can determine by him/herself whether there are sufficient relevant similarities that make it plausible that the research conclusions should hold in other situation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this paper has been to discuss some of the epistemological issues encountered during a classroom research. Specifically, this paper aimed to address the yet to be resolved issue about the way researchers make value claims regarding the authenticity of their findings. It has not focused on the specific issues of using any or all of the methods triangulated in the course of the study, which has influenced this paper. Such issues however form a wider discourse which is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, this paper discusses how the scrupulous application of some qualitative methods by this researcher led to the construction of the story of how young adults perceived of education in a high school within a Nigerian suburb. This researcher argues that the stories, which emerged from this encounter, were as representative as events in the lives of the participants in the study. This researcher also argues that validity of any research finding resonates from the effect such account makes in the lives of those for whom the study was conducted.

Although both quantitative and qualitative research approaches are committed to improving upon what is known about a phenomenon, they nonetheless pursue different research agenda. Both research approaches have differential operational purpose; seek differential data which result in findings that are very distinctive ontologically and epistemologically. In comparison to quantitative studies, findings from qualitative research such as the one which has influenced this paper, are better positioned to offer varied and in-depth understanding on the ways through which the participants in the study had come to perceive of education. Again, various methods used by this researcher in his study enabled him enter the world of the participants in ways difficult through the “agreed and disagreed” patterns common with the quantitative design. In particular, the type of interaction involved in the use of focus group discussion enabled this researcher to gain insights in ways that would remain inaccessible by other means. The approach was very exploratory, leading to revelations from the emic perspective of those individuals involved in the study.

On the strength of these, qualitative research stands out as a unique research paradigm with an agenda aimed at capturing the internal processes through which individuals in a study have been involved. However, both quantitative and

qualitative research methods can play important supplementary role for each other; none should be seen as a handmaid of the other. The distinction between both paradigms therefore should be maintained as healthy dichotomous epistemologies. Qualitative researchers are therefore encouraged to maintain the ever-growing momentum in the quest for qualitative specific criteria for assessment. This is one panacea against the unwarranted war of legitimation, which qualitative research currently suffers from positivists.

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