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Selecting research approaches and research designs: a reflective essay

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to show the research process which is laid on the interrelated aspects of paradigm-research-based approaches and research designs.
Design/methodology/approach – It draws on my PhD research project experience, where I deployed these interrelated aspects informing my methodological perspective to produce quality research via the generation of legitimate research findings.
Findings – From this practice, my chosen held paradigm, constructionism, has guided me to proceed with my research process, leading to the selection of a research approach (qualitative case study) and research designs (interviews, observation, and document analysis).
Originality/value – This conduct helps valorise the legitimacy of my research findings to produce legitimate knowledge. This reflective account of the research process can become a lesson for others who wish to go through a legitimate process of selecting the research approaches and research designs, particularly, in social sciences.
Keywords Case study, Research designs, Paradigms, Qualitative, Research approaches, Constructionism
Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

> How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to? (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 290).

The question posed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) above inspired me to write my methodology, and accordingly acted as my point of departure to demonstrate the quality of my research which was highlighted in the research process in terms of the tying of specific theories, and paradigms (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Maxwell, 2005; Creswell, 2008).

In elaborating the methodological perspectives which will inform and guide my research, I was basically influenced by the four elements of research process proffered by Crotty (1998). Those elements are "epistemology", "theoretical perspective" (philosophical stance or ontology), "methodology", and "method". In this way, it was important to provide a clear process (research process) in how I chose the philosophical stance or paradigm that informed the choice of methodology and method (how I proceeded with the research procedures). Arguably, this process of research, indeed, is assumed to have impacts on the strength of research designs which at the end contribute to the production of legitimate knowledge – thus leading to a contribution to the related literature (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2008).

To be specific, the purpose of elucidating and identifying the components and phases of the process in carrying out the research is to provide a model for reflection and identification of the paradigm and methodology used in education research exercise that could be adopted in some forms by others undertaking PhD studies. Those phases encompassed selecting the analytic devices to analyse qualitative data; factors influencing me in the course of selecting the appropriate epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and method; and how these four interwoven elements of research process shaped my ways in analysing the data.

To strengthen the trustworthiness of the chosen methodology and method, previous empirical research drawn from the relevant literature was presented along with an audit trail pertinent to the transparency and credibility of the research process (Tracy, 2010).

To do so, this paper is divided into six sections. The first section is concerned with the research process on choosing the appropriate interrelated methodology, method, theoretical perspective, and epistemology. In this way, an intertwined hierarchical relationship of these four elements was elaborated to demonstrate a clear picture of how they inform one another, and the reasons to choose each of the chosen elements. The second section refers to the methodology which describes the plans and actions of this research and the guiding philosophical stance embedded in it. The third section deals with the procedures and techniques to carry out the research. The second and third sections also serve as the "audit trail" as they are referred to the transparency and credibility of the research process. By doing so, the issues pertinent to subjectivity or bias, reliability, and validity of my research can be evidently addressed and overcome. The fourth section deals with the role of theory, and the fifth and sixth sections proceed with the ethical consideration and the issues of reliability and validity, respectively.

The research process

There are many styles or variants in qualitative research, such as survey, case study, ethnography, and experiment (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Robson, 1993; Silverman, 2011). These styles of research have their own purposes, foci, paradigms, and approaches in studying the phenomena (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Due to the nature of these styles, scholars have proposed ways to plan and execute qualitative studies. Cohen *et al.* (2011), Maxwell (2005), and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argued that defining the specific purpose of research constitutes the ground to begin to design qualitative research.

Bearing this in mind, as a starting point, I began my research process by determining the research purpose and intention to bridge to appropriately select the sort of methodology and method I embarked on. The purpose of my research is to provide a rich description, explanation, and understanding of the experiences, and actions of academics in their subjectivity or in their own context or through the "emic" perspective – and the meanings they gave to the government-driven change processes or reforms on higher education in Indonesia, embodied in the effectuation of the Higher Education Act (2012). Such reforms have been organised within the notion of the economisation of higher education in the economy and knowledge society brought forth by the advent of neoliberalism. The agenda of neoliberalism is implicitly identified in the Higher Education Act (2012). The reforms have just gone into effect recently (Higher Education Act, 2012) in all universities across Indonesia and have been assumed to be a contemporary phenomenon occurring in Indonesian university contexts. Referring to this supposition, I decided to choose a case study as the methodology (Stake, 1995; Bassey, 1999; Yin, 2009). Then, from the chosen methodology, I planned what instruments I used to collect data to answer the research questions.

In view of the research questions, it can be concluded that they are the "how" questions which are explicitly suited to explore in qualitative research, rather than quantitative research (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). There are main methods for data collection in naturalistic inquiry, which fit with this type of question, they are participant observations, interviews and conversations, documents and field notes, accounts, and notes and memos (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Robson, 1993; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). For my research, I selected to apply three instruments for collecting data, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis.

So far, I have identified the methodology and the method to use. However, choosing the methodology and the method for my research is not merely an action of aligning them with research questions; rather it transcends the boundary of my assumption about the reality

I brought into my research. It is the way we look at our world and make sense of it (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998). This has something to do with the philosophical stance that lies behind this chosen methodology, used for the justification of the chosen methodology. Crotty (1998) called "theoretical perspectives" or "ontology" as called by Denzin and Lincoln (1994). The theoretical perspectives are an assumption of "what human knowledge is, what it entails, and what characteristics do we believe that knowledge to have" (p. 2), while ontology is related to the question of "what is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). A combination of epistemology, theoretical perspectives or ontology and methodology makes up the construct of a paradigm. The paradigm is "a set of basic belief system (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). Before providing my chosen theoretical perspective that informed my chosen methodology, it would be immensely useful at the outset to understand the varieties of interpretive research to know its underlying assumptions in viewing the world.

Cohen *et al.* (2011) provided us with two general kinds of terminology used in distinguishing between the positivist and the subjectivist approach to research. The first was represented with the "normative" and the latter was represented with "interpretive" terminology. I will only focus on the latter in relation to my research. One important issue in understanding the interpretive school of thought is to come to know its underlying principles in viewing the world or phenomena being investigated. In this case, interpretivists view the phenomena being studied as subjective to human experiences. Therefore, in order to come to understand human experiences, efforts are made to get inside their world and understand them from within (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, knowledge or reality is not out there, but in here in the subjective experiences or minds of participants (Hatch, 1997a).

There are wide varieties of interpretive research, ranging from phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Silverman, 2011). These are the study of human beings' experiences but they are embedded with different ideologies to study lived experiences of human beings. Phenomenology, for example, focusses on the description of people being studied at face value ignoring the external and objective realities described (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Ethnomethodology is the study of methods people use for constructing reality in everyday life. Unlike phenomenology, this approach is very much concerned with how social realities are constructed in social interactions (Silverman, 2011). The ethnomethodological approach is very much similar to the symbolic interactionism in that the social world is constructed through social interactions through the use of symbol (language) to attribute meanings to object. Through the use of language, people come to share the same meaning and understanding in their social interactions (Mead, 1934; cited in Beatty, 2002). In this way, the "I" and "me" intermingle to create common understandings in their social interactions. The "I" is the personal individual within a given society or organisations, which he/she interacts with the "me" as other individual in the same given society. The "I" and the "me" then develop interactions to understand each other through the use of symbol (language) attributed to objects. Thus, they can understand each other through the process of meaning making to create their culture. Symbolic interactionism is embedded in constructionism where the world or knowledge is developed and transmitted through interactive human community or through the significant others.

My study is based on a constructivist epistemology, where epistemology is "a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The constructivist epistemological position is that truth or knowledge is not separated from human beings, rather it is integrated into the social context through which knowledge is co-constructed. In adopting this epistemological premise, the theoretical perspective adopted

in the study is that an exploration of a social phenomenon requires a study of lived experiences of people through an understanding of their social world. This generates an interpretation. These theoretical perspectives could be referred to as interpretivism.

Taken together, these three research elements work like this. For example, a researcher's choice of the epistemology is the constructivism; the theoretical perspective he or she applies could be the interpretivism. Interpretivism associates its concept with Weber's concept of "Verstehen" which means understanding something in its context (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998). Researchers working in this theoretical perspective will study the phenomena through analysing the meanings participants associate with them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). This theoretical perspective will be implicit in the research questions and guide the methodology or plan of research and analysis of data. The research questions then dictate the method of data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009).

The hierarchical description in Figures 1 and 2 gives an easy understanding of the relationships of these four elements of the research process in my research, and how they inform one another.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), researchers who decide to work within the vein of constructivists are relativist, transactional, and subjectivist. The relativist stance holds an assumption that "there is no objective truth to be known" (p. 54) and emphasises on the diversity of interpretations that can be applied to the world on account of the subjective experience of the respondents. Crotty (1998) did not applies the term of ontology to his paradigm as opposed to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), rather introduced the term of theoretical perspective that is informed by and embedded in the epistemology.

Figure 1.
The hierarchy of four elements of research process
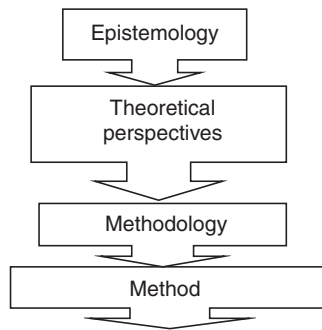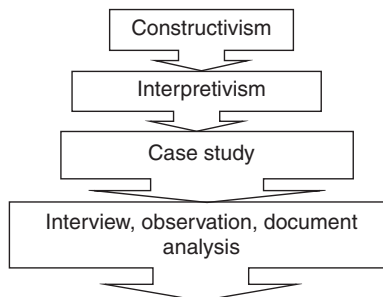
Source: Crotty (1998)

Figure 2.
The specific hierarchy of four elements of research process

The methodology

My chosen methodology is the case study. My methodology to explore the issue raised in my research is drawn from the research questions, the specific purpose of my research, and the epistemology and ontology that I adopt (constructivism and interpretivism).

The purpose of my study was to provide in-depth and rich descriptions, explorations, and understandings of the reform process in higher education systems in Indonesia resulting from the enactment of economic-driven policy (The Higher Education Act, 2012) set up by the Indonesian Government. To explore this process deeply, the formulation of three research questions using "how" and "what" were put forward. These types of questions helped me both provide a descriptive and an exploratory interpretation of the phenomena being studied through social interactions, experiences, and actions of Indonesian academics and how they gave meaning to this change process. To this extent, it required me to closely pay attention to the context in which these elements took place. From the interpretivism perspective, there appeared to be an array of methodologies that can be used to study human experiences. Among these, the case study approach is deemed to be suitable to guide to establish techniques and procedures to proceed with my research, because the study of the change process in Indonesian higher education poses a contemporary phenomenon and cannot be separated from its context. The case study approach is considered as an ideal approach when we want to understand holistically "a contemporary phenomenon (e.g. a 'case'), set within its real-world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

The context and phenomenon have become inseparable components in a case study. The context provides a medium to better and deeply understand the case or the contemporary phenomenon in particular (Yin, 2009). The closeness of examination of these interrelated elements in their natural settings is aimed at producing deep understandings and the appreciation of the case(s). In addition to the context itself to understand the contemporary phenomenon, there are other complex conditions embedded in determining the understanding of the cases being studied. With this caveat comes the expectation of extracting a new learning about a real-world behaviour and its meaning (Yin, 2009).

In view of this caveat, my desire to get deep understandings about the contemporary phenomenon or the case about the implication of the implementation of higher education reform embodied in the enactment of the Higher Education Act (2012) can be facilitated by examining the real world or original contexts of Indonesian higher institutions. The first step in the design process to obtain the answers for the problems raised in my research was to define what "the case" is. When using "the case" or unit of analysis (Yin, 2009), I was dictated by the definitional notion proffered by Yin (2012, p. 6) that:

> […] a case is "generally a bounded entity (a person, organisation, behavioural condition, event, or other social phenomenon" but the boundary between the case and its contextual conditions–in both spatial and temporal dimensions – may be blurred, as previously noted. The case serves as the main unit of analysis in a case study.

In regard to this, I determined that the main case or unit of analysis in my research was the economically government-driven reforms on higher education embodied in the enactment of the Higher Education Act (2012) to elevate the economic competitiveness of Indonesia. This policy imperative enactment required me to collect data from academic communities through several sources of data in the three universities to understand deeply the impacts or implications of this policy for their academic identity and their institutions. The inclusion of this practice made my case study to have a nested unit (embedded subcases) within the main unit (Yin, 2009). To gain invaluable and deep understandings about the case, I examined the context in which this phenomenon took place. To do so, understanding the context about the Indonesian higher education and economic current condition and

development was highly important. Considering all the above facts, I concluded that my case study was classified as the embedded multiple-case study, where the boundaries between the case and its context were blurred.

Figure 3 provides a clear picture about the vagueness or opaqueness of the boundaries between the phenomenon being studied and its context. The dashed line demonstrates the blurred boundaries between the case and its context (Yin, 2009).

The multiple-case study is substantially important to increase the robustness of the methodology and to enable the generation of theory (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009). In addition, for my research, the multiple-case study can cover the questions of "how" or descriptive and exploratory interpretations of the research findings through the comparison of cases in light of the implementation of the policy and academics responses to this.

After defining the case or unit analysis of my research, I turned to other important factor of self-reflexivity in relation to the positionality (Louis and Barton, 2002) in this research. This is important to address a potential "bias" in interpreting the data resulted from my first-hand knowledge about the situation and context where my research was carried out. Research in the research was carried out in three state universities in three different cities in Indonesia. Two out of these three universities (The University of Mawar and Anggrek) were perfectly unknown territory to me. Accordingly, this constraining condition forced me to apply techniques in order to gain an in-depth understanding about participants' thoughts and behaviour grounded in their own context or real life. This can be achieved through a prolonged immersion and close interaction into their contexts, being as a native (Geertz, 1973). In this way, it is expected that the "emic" interpretation of the observed behaviours and thoughts can be accomplished.

This situation directly contributed as well to define my positionality (Louis and Barton, 2002) as a researcher. My positionality, subsequently, is categorised as an outsider researcher "etic" (Stake, 1995; Salmons, 2010). I, as the outsider because I was detached from them, serving as the outside onlooker who brought in questions in order to explore problems in my research questions (Salmons, 2010).

Figure 3.
Embedded
multiple-case study
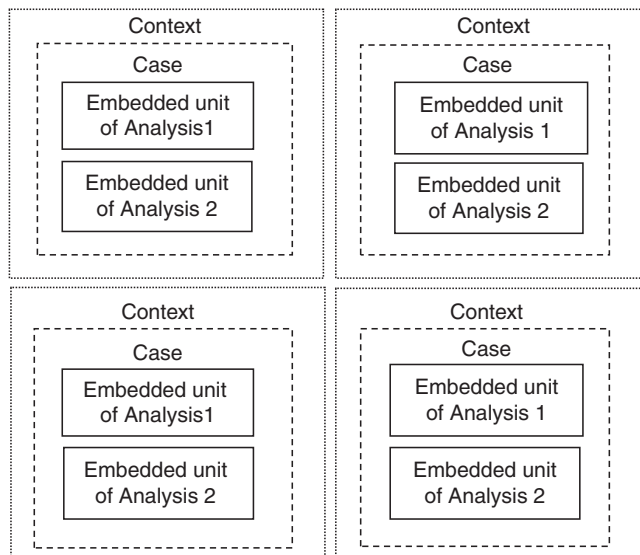
Source: Cosmos Corporation (cited in Yin, 2009)

In one university (Melati) which is well known to me, my positionality as an insider researcher is basically built upon our membership as university staff. This situation may have implication on the assumption I make in the interpretation process of observed events in the institutions, even though in interpretive research it is acknowledged that the subjectivity and the phenomenon being studied are intertwined and inseparable elements (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Bryman, 2012). The position as a researcher is important to conduct in a qualitative research (Louis and Barton, 2002; Salmons, 2010). The choice of the position of whether we as an outsider or as an insider would affect the trustworthiness of our research, particularly related to the problem of bias of our findings, due to the influences of our values, experiences, perceptions, and meanings may intervene our interpretations in the data (Louis and Barton, 2002; Salmons, 2010). However, the choice of the philosophical stance may help negotiate this problem (Maxwell, 2005; Creswell, 2008).

Given the aforesaid issues, therefore, the methodology that is appropriate to apply is the case study approach with interviews, observations, and document analysis as instruments to collect data.

Methods of data collection
As mentioned above, I used three instruments to collect data as a triangulation. These three instruments are useful to strengthen the validity of the data obtained. Therefore, I cannot rely only on the participants' perceptions and take them as the truth evidence of their academic world.

Sampling procedures
Sampling procedures to choose multiple cases in this study were the concerted applications of both the premise of a "replication logic" (Yin, 2009), and a "purposeful sampling cluster case framework" (Patton, 1990). The replication logic consists of a literal and theoretical replication. The literal replication is concerned with the selection of cases from similar settings to produce similar results, while the theoretical replication is used to select cases that have different settings to obtain different results (Yin, 2009). While the replication logic with its two approaches as mentioned above does not methodologically provide guidance for a multiple-case selection, the "three- cluster case framework" developed from the 16 purposeful samplings and purposeful sampling strategies proffered by Patton (1990) was utilised for the sampling.

The three general cluster case frameworks developed by Patton (1990) are significant vs ordinary case cluster, different vs similar case cluster, and predetermined vs ad hoc case cluster. These three purposeful samplings have purposeful sampling strategies to select multiple cases (Patton, 1990; Sakir, 2002). Table I illustrates these three cluster frameworks (Patton, 1990; Sakir, 2002).

Referring back to the purpose of my research as elaborated earlier (to gain an in-depth and rich description, exploration, and understanding of reform process in the Indonesian higher education system), my sampling procedures cut across diverse and similar characteristics of groups involved. With regard to this, the case selection was grounded on the combination of the purposeful ordinary case sampling with typical case sampling strategy, and the purposeful maximum variation sampling with stratified purposeful sampling strategy. Although the maximum variation sampling can be problematic, particularly in a small sample with high heterogeneous characteristics of cases, this sampling strategy, though can increase the strength of the results, as Patton (1990) argued "any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program" (p. 172). Therefore, I decided to use this sampling procedure to recruit a small sample in each

Purposeful sampling cluster	Purposeful sampling strategy	Is contrasted to	Purposeful sampling strategy	Purposeful sampling cluster
Significant cases	Extreme case Intensity case Critical case Politically important case	←——————→	Typical cases	Ordinary cases
Different cases	Maximum variation Random purposeful Stratified purposeful cases	←——————→	Homogeneous	Similar cases
Fieldwork determined cases	Snowball Opportunistic Criterion Theoretical	←——————→	Convenience	Ad hoc case selection
A priori theory determined cases	Confirming and disconfirming			

Table I.
The three cluster framework of purposeful samplings

university. In addition, the selection of the small sample is in line with the purpose of my research which is to gain the depth of the research findings (Patton, 1990).

Because my research purpose was also exploratory in nature and adopted a multiple-case study approach, the typical or ordinary case is considered appropriated to describe "what is typical" (Patton, 1990, p. 173) in the process of reform in Indonesian higher education systems. The second sampling strategy addressed the issue of maximum variation for the purpose of obtaining "a wide range of variation on dimensions of interest" (Patton, 1990, p. 182).

The maximum variation sampling was appropriated in my study to select universities in Indonesia to investigate the implementation and implication of higher education reform that has gone into effect in 2012 to all Indonesian universities across Indonesia. Considering that the Indonesian universities spread across the archipelago with different characteristics and classifications based on research performance as determined by the Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE) (2012), the issue of geographical and classification representation can be overcome with this sampling strategy. With regard to this, three state universities from different parts or islands in Indonesia, representing three geographical regions (the Western, the Central, and the Eastern regions) were selected to take part in this study based on the classification of university types taken from the DGHE (2012). On the basis of the research performance, universities in Indonesia are classified into four clusters (independent, main, middle, and nurtured clusters). Independent clusters are those associated with research universities, and the main, the middle, and the nurtured clusters are associated with non-research universities. With the stratified sampling strategy, I selected three universities in three clusters to represent the types of universities. Through the stratified sampling strategy as well, I set the criterion of only those universities that perform good or better research performance were included. Therefore, indeed, the nurtured clusters of universities, which were categorised as poor research performance, were opted out. From stratifying the performance of universities in research, subsequently, one independent research (The University of Mawar), one main non-research university (The University of Anggrek), and one middle non-research university (The University of Melati) were chosen. The purpose of a stratified purposeful sampling is "to capture major variations, or to produce theoretical replication (Yin, 2009), rather than to identify a common core, although the latter may also emerge in the analysis" (Patton, 1990, p. 174). The use of pseudonyms to denote the universities was intended to preserve the anonymity

of universities under study. Further maximum variation sampling was applied to locate the embedded units in each university. Referring to Becher (1994) who argued that academics are affected by their epistemological stance in perceiving their work and the nature of their work, the selection of embedded units was grounded on the two different disciplines which represent the "soft" and the "hard science". In this case, the Language and Literature/ cultural studies and the Engineering Faculty were selected.

The selection of participants in each university was carried out differently from those of university selections. The purposeful sampling undertaken was the "fieldwork determined cases with the snowball purposeful sampling strategy" in order to locate information-rich cases (Patton, 1990). In this way, my endeavour was to seek respondents who know a lot about the reform process in their universities through the information of other participants in the field. Through other participants' information, the participants partaking in my research got bigger and bigger. On the basis of this sampling, 30 academics from two different disciplines (the Engineering Faculty and the Language and Literature or Cultural Studies Faculty) and from three state universities participated in this research assuming different kinds of roles. In total, 12 respondents are women aged between 39 and 62 years and the other 18 are men aged between 40 and 63 years. All female respondents are teaching staff, while three of the male participants are the heads of department and the other three are the deans of the faculty within three universities under study. The remaining 12 of the male respondents are also teaching staff. The Language and Literature Faculty in the University of Melati and Cultural Studies Faculty in the Universities of Mawar and Anggrek are the same disciplines, only universities under this study have used different names. To denote these two disciplines, abbreviations were applied, namely, the "Eng" to refer to the Engineering Faculty, the "Lit" and "Cult" to denote The Language and Literature Faculty and the Cultural Studies Faculty, respectively.

Theoretical framework
The role of theory in the case study research is pivotal and this makes it different from other research methods, such as ethnography and grounded theory (Yin, 2009). The theory is an explanation of the phenomena being studied. The theory can be drawn from a different field of studies of disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology, linguistics, organisational theory, and so on. The theoretical framework in research serves as a lens to study the phenomena. It helps to stretch ones' mind into understanding of the story about what is going on in organisations being investigated (Anfara and Mertz, 2006). Maxwell (2005) defined the theoretical framework as "the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research" (p. 33).

For case study researchers, Yin (2009) recommended to conduct an initial theory building, prior to entering the field to collect data. The theory development is essential to provide a theoretical supposition or hypothetical theory about why the events, acts, and thoughts occur. Thus, this helps pave clear clues and paths to "explore what is to be explored, the purpose of the exploration, and the criteria by which the exploration will be judged successful" (Yin, 2009, p. 37). With regard to this, I built my hypothetical theories as follows:

The case study will demonstrate what changes taking place when the economic language of neoliberalism is represented in the reforms on higher education, and why such reforms have bad implications for academics or professional identity of academic communities (Olssen and Peters, 2005).

When this practice is taken, the policy implementation is best practised within rational process of scientific management, and why this scientific process gained resistance from professional communities (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Lorenz, 2012).

Drawing upon this, I then adopted neoliberalism theory, the neo-Weberian state model, academic identity, and resistance theory. With these multifaceted theories I proposed would contribute to the soundness of the face and content validity (Tracy, 2010) of my research.

Ethical considerations

Ethics in research is germane to the judgement in light of the rightness, appropriateness, and wrongness of actions applied in the whole research processes (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Tracy, 2010). Due to the nature of interpretivism research which is to explore and understand the social world of the phenomenon being studied in which close relationship and engagement must inevitably be built, the issue of ethics plays a vital role to protect and prevent people from any harm arising from the relationship between the researchers and participants (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Tracy, 2010; Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). To mediate the exploration and understanding of the social world of the participants, researchers usually use a set of data instruments to collect data, i.e. interviews, observations, and document analysis. These sets of instruments are directed at obtaining a rich and deep exploration and understanding of the human social world where direct involvements and close relationships in the context in which the phenomena being studied are needed (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Bryman, 2012; Hammersley and Traianou, 2012).

However, qualitative data collection and analysis are not simply a technical matter of building close relationships with the participants in natural settings and of seeking the quality of knowledge, but there are more than that need to be fully taken into consideration – particularly in terms of how these conducts are ethically performed. As noted by Miles and Huberman (1994):

> Qualitative data analysis is more than a technical matter. We cannot focus only on the quality of the knowledge we are producing, as if its truth were all that counts. We must also consider the rightness or wrongness of our actions as qualitative researchers in relation to the people whose lives we are studying, to our colleagues, and to those who sponsor our work (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 288).

In addressing about ethics in the research process, some prominent scholars have proposed the theory of ethics. One of them is Flinders (1992), who developed four frameworks of ethical theories: utilitarian perspectives, deontological perspectives, relational perspectives, and ecological perspectives. The utilitarian perspectives are closely related to procedural ethics (Tracy, 2010), which deals with the issue of procedures undertaken in the fieldwork in relation to the participants' recruitments. The basic tenet that governs the recruitment of participants is highly grounded on the protection of participants from any harms, protection of confidentiality, and protection of the rights of participants to voluntarily participate in research (Flinders, 1992; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Tracy, 2010). The deontological perspectives, on the other hand, emphasise the reciprocal relationship between researchers and the researched in the process of recruitment which takes the form of avoidance of wrongness, and of fairness in the reporting process in the first place. Within the relational perspectives, the process of recruitment of participants is vested on the principle of collaboration in terms of an equal position between researchers and the researched (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Tracy, 2010). The ecological perspectives are closely concerned with the cultural sensitivity in the context of the phenomenon being studied (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Tracy, 2010).

While Flinders offered four ethical procedures in conducting research, Tracy (2010), on the other hand, proposed three sorts of ethical procedures: they are procedural ethics (similar to utilitarian), situational ethics (respecting the context of research), and exiting ethics (informing participants on the way data will be handled upon leaving the research sites). I was interested to deploy Tracy's forms of ethics to explain the ethical procedures undertaken in the process of my research.

On the basis of Tracy's (2010) ethical procedures, I framed my research ethical procedures as follows:

(1) Procedural ethics:

- Permissions were sought from the authority in each university prior to conducting data collection.

- The respondents were made available about all information related to this research through a participant information sheet. This sheet contained information about the purpose of the research; the nature of respondents' participation which was highly on the basis of voluntariness; their right to withdraw at any time during the ongoing research activities without providing any reasons and without any harms their right to know any likely risks arose from their participation; the right to know how data will be handled, analysed, and destroyed; and the right to decide whether to participate in the research or not through the signed inform consent.

- The nature and procedures of the research were reiterated in each interview.

(2) Situational ethics:

- During data collection in each university, I made attempt to not interrupt the daily activities of the university.

- Moreover, I made efforts to respect the culture held by each university and adapted my manner to that culture.

(3) Exiting ethics:

- Upon leaving the research site, I informed participants about how the data collected and their privacy will be handled.

- To preserve anonymity of both the respondents and their institutions, the use of pseudonyms was applied.

- To ensure confidentiality, all data obtained were strictly protected both in a private password-protected laptop and university computers. The data were only accessed by me and my supervisors. The data will be destroyed after five years.

- To ensure transparency of the research process, the audit trail was undertaken and presented in a detailed explanation, encompassing all processes that had been gone through during the research process.

Reliability and validity

Reliability is closely related to the notion of "replicability" or the consistency of research findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Babbie, 2003). There are two types of reliability: they are internal and external reliability (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Babbie, 2003). The internal reliability is concerned with the extent to which two or more researchers using particular methods and instruments on studying the same phenomenon can produce the same results or findings in different contexts (Babbie, 2003; Bryman, 2012). The external reliability refers to the extent to which a researcher can replicate the findings of another, using the same methods and conditions at different times and conditions.

In qualitative research, this issue is problematic as reality or human behaviours are changeable. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) used "dependability" instead of reliability to show the quality of qualitative research, especially those who work in the interpretive and constructionist paradigm. The researchers discern reality as changeable. Therefore, results

can vary in line with the changing context (Blanche and Durheim, 1999). The most important thing in the interpretive and constructionist framework is the detailed and rich descriptions of the context in order to convince readers that such an event really occurs in reality.

Because meaning or truth is socially constructed and consensually validated, meaning or truth is relative. Relative means that reality is temporary. It can change through time and place, "never absolute across time and space, this reluctance to generalise and the suspicion of generalisations asserted by others" (Patton, 2002, p. 100). Interpretivism provides a deep and detailed description of the context in order to give meaning. With a case study the case is an object of interest in its own right, and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of it. "Measurement validity, internal validity, external validity, reliability, ecological validity, and replicability depends in large part on how far the researcher feels that these are appropriate for the evaluation of the case study research" (Bryman, 2012, p. 69). What is more pivotal in my case study is the relatability (Bassey, 1999), which emphasises the ability of my research findings to invite judgement from readers, so that the reader could relate them to her own situation.

Validity refers to the accuracy of the research findings. As with reliability, validity likewise consists of two types, internal and external validity. The internal validity refers to the extent to which the findings are able to be interpreted accurately (Bryman, 2012). The external validity deals with the extent to which the results of the research are able to be generalisable (Bryman, 2012). Again, the issue of validity in interpretive study is also problematic because the subjective nature of this research, where the researchers are the primary instruments to collect and analyse data.

Apart from this, my research has a sound internal validity because it utilised multiple sources of data collection (interviews, observations, and official document analysis). In addition, the case selection in which this research was conducted required me to spend much time in investigating the appropriate case. Furthermore, I was involved in a long immersion with the faculties to collect data through interviews, observations, and to gather official documents. The internal validity of this research was strengthened as well from interviewing multiple sources of people and triangulating their stories or triangulation within the case (Stake, 1995).

As for the external validity of this research, it was informed within the norm of social constructivist paradigm which embraces the interpretivist method in interpreting human experiences. The interpretive method is a method that tries to describe and interpret people's feelings and experiences (Blanche and Durheim, 1999, p. 123). To ensure the external validity of my research, I provided rich and thick descriptions and the interpretive method is an ideal tool in providing such descriptions (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

The issue of validity in qualitative research has been a subject of debate among scholars. The key area of debate has been on the matter of how knowledge is obtained in order to yield a legitimate knowledge. The proponent of the qualitative research tries to respond to this issue by providing the criteria or strategies to determine the trustworthiness of the research. Denzin and Lincoln (1994), for example, put forward four components in addressing the validity of qualitative research. Those four elements are "credibility" which parallels with internal validity, "transferability" which parallels with external validity, "dependability" which parallels with reliability, and "confirmability" which parallels with objectivity (in Bryman, 2012, p. 390). Internal validity can be achieved by using a "triangulation" which consists of four types, i.e. multiple investigators, multiple theories, multiple sources of data, and multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings. External validity refers to generalisability which can be attained through rich and thick descriptions (Merriam, 1998). My research is squarely placed within the paradigm of constructionism which holds an assumption that the knowledge or truth is co-constructed by the researchers and the participants. Therefore, knowledge or truth is subjective construction of subjective experiences from the

respondents through their association of meanings they attach to their experiences. Here, the role of the researchers is seen as a primary instrument in collecting data to make sense of the phenomenon being studied. Because my research is a case study, the generalisability will depend on the capability of my research to invite judgement from readers that the phenomenon is suited to their context (Bassey, 1999). By advancing this argument, the technique of establishing and enhancing the trustworthiness of qualitative research as mentioned above may solve the problem.

At the end, I have provided a credible research process in my research by using specific theories and paradigms. Thus, it would make my research produce legitimate new learning of real-world behaviour and its meaning.

Conclusion

The process of research which involves four interrelated elements to proceed with research is important to produce legitimate knowledge. This can be achieved through reciprocal links amongst "epistemology", "theoretical perspective" (philosophical stance or ontology), "methodology", and "method". The choice of epistemology can enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of research as the researchers may have a good understanding on what knowledge or reality is, how it is constructed, and where it should be investigated. To this extent, the researchers can build their research approach through an appropriate lens to select an appropriate methodology and a method which suit the purposes and goals of research.

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