MY RESEARCH JOURNEY:
WHY DO I CHOOSE THE QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY OVER THE QUANTITATIVE ONE?

Saidatul Akmar Ismail
Faculty of Information Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Perdana Campus
40150 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
e-mail: *saidatulakmar@salam.uitm.edu.my*
tele: *011-26101934*

Abstract: *The research employs qualitative research for the project, focusing on factors, and using a qualitative method, within an interpretive philosophy. Interpretivism is a suitable epistemology for framing a study about process, which is widely agreed to be a complex, subjective, and abstract phenomenon that does not exist independently from people's activities. Interpretive research is valuable for its ability to produce deep insights into IS phenomena. Therefore, in this paper, a paradigm of a research and an interpretive philosophy are discussed in order to understand how both concepts could produce deep insights into the research problem of the study which is poorly understood: the way in which IL is implemented in the primary schools.*

Keywords: *Qualitative, quantitative, methods, methodology, paradigm, Interpretivism, epistemology*

INTRODUCTION

This study sought to identify and understand factors affecting the implementation of ILE in Malaysian primary schools. The factors were identified from the interviewees' responses to the interview questions, which in turn sought to address the two research questions:

- What are the factors affecting the implementation of ILE in Malaysian primary schools?
- How do these factors facilitate or hinder ILE implementation in Malaysian primary schools?

To answer both research questions, one of the efforts was to begin the research journey with research paradigm. This article discusses the paradigm that guides this research which explains why the authorl used a qualitative methodology and methods within an interpretive philosophy.

PARADIGM: INTERPRETIVISM

A paradigm is *"the basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation"* (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, cited in Krauss, 2005). To me, a research paradigm is a set of beliefs that go together to guide the actions as to how she is to go about doing research. In order to conduct this study, there are four aspects of a research paradigm that are

combined and will be the focus for carrying out the research, namely the ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology.

First, is the ontology which means a belief in the nature of reality, i.e., what you believe is real in the world. Second is epistemology, which is how you think about that reality. Third is the research methodology. This is how you are going to use the way of thinking (epistemology) to gain more knowledge about the world or reality. The final aspect is the axiology which includes a set of morals or a set of ethics. These four aspects go together to form a research paradigm (Wilson, 2001).

For this study, the interpretivismwas the chosen paradigm because it lends itself to the particular investigation that was undertakren. The study focused on the implementation of ILE in the Malaysian primary schools. Following the ontological belief of interpretivism, the social world is not "*given*" (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991: 14). The social world is shaped and supported by humans through their "subjective and inter-subjective" perceptions and interactions (p.5). The actions and interactions among the ILE implementers (participants of this study) at school level and key informants at state and federal levels shaped and supported (or not supported) the implementation of ILE. My study attempted to understand ILE implementation through accessing the meanings that participants at school level and key informants at state and federal levels assigned to them. Thus, in interpretivism, there is no universal truth to understand a phenomenon particularly within cultural and contextual situations.

Epistemologically, the interpretive philosophy is premised on the belief that the phenomenon of interest is examined in its natural setting. This philosophy asserts that the language humans' use in their setting describes their social practices (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p.14). In order to understand the reality of the setting, I have to go inside the world which is generating it. The meanings and practices of social reality are formed and informed by the language use, and cultural norms shared by the humans in the setting. My study, for instance, examined ILE implementation in the primary school setting. The primary schools are situated in a developing country, namely Malaysia. Malaysia is a multi-cultural and multi lingual country. Thus, my study tried to understand the participants' views of their social world and their role at school, state or federal levels. This study requiredme to understand how the practices and meanings shared by these participants work towards teaching and learning ILE in schools.

On the other hand, positivism and critical realism were not chosen because their attributes were not appropriate to the investigation for the following reasons:

i. Ontologically, positivists say that there is only one reality. Following from this, their epistemology is based on the idea that reality has to be as objective as possible, therefore, is something to be determined by the researcher. Their methodologies are quantitatively based.

ii. While critical theorists also maintain that there may be one reality, it is fluid and depends on factors such as gender, culture and social class (Wilson, 2001). These factors may influence the fluid reality. People have the ability to change the social

conditions. Thus, the critical theorists' epistemology is context-based. The methodology reflects the ontology. In addition, their axiology is depending on the researcher to change the current reality for the betterment of the people he or she is working with. The critical researcher works for social change. This is the basis of participatory or action research, which seeks to be *"emancipatory"* (that is, to help eliminate the causes of alienation and domination) in the society (Wilson, 2001; Myer, 1997). The following section discusses the methodology appropriate to what the researcher seeks to discover.

METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE APPROACH

In order to conduct the research, three methodologies can be adopted: quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods. According to Silverman (2005), the choice of methodology should be appropriate to the research problem. In my research, the problem investigated was that it was unclear what factors facilitate or hinder the implementation of ILE in Malaysian primary education. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the factors that are affecting the implementation of ILE in primary schools in Malaysia.

The researcher has chosen a qualitative approach because the attributes of this approach suit to the particular investigation that has been conducted. Qualitative research can be defined as "a family of approaches whose goal [is] understanding the lived experience of persons who share time, space and culture" (Frankel & Devers, 2000, p.113). The use of this approach allows me to gather rich description of how people experience a phenomenon of interest or research issue, and access the human side of the issue. It is more effective to identify social reality in the cultural and contextual setting.

There are numerous unique characteristics of qualitative research contended by scholars. It is not possible to summarise them all in such a limited space. The following attributes are regarded as the most important to the study.

i.   Meanings from the inside of social setting
     Qualitative researchers attempt to understand meanings that people give to the phenomenon of interest. That means the researcher sees people from the inside of their social setting. For example, this study conducts interviews with the ILE implementers at school level, and key informants at state and federal levels. I am able to understand what they feel about ILE, and the way ILE is (or is not) implemented in the schools. What sort of obstacles do they notice about implementing ILE in their schools? Such questions are relevant to generate understanding in the process of ILE implementation in schools from the viewpoints of the participants.

ii. Direct contacts with people
     Qualitative researcher enters into the natural setting of the people whom they study, and with whom they have face-to-face interviews. This type of approach is also known as "fieldwork" (Oka & Shaw, 2000, para.4). This study is an attempt to know the extent of ILE implementation within the context of primary schools'

teaching and learning process. I closely interacted with the participants of this study to gain rich descriptions of the way they perceive ILE through their words. However, the direct and close contact with the participants and their lives, it gives rise to several ethical issues that were dealt earlier before and after entering the research site.

iii. Inductive strategy

In this study, the researcher employs analytic inductive strategy in the research design, fieldwork and analysis. For example, this study covers five primary schools. There were face-to-face interviews with five participants in each school. The participants purposively selected because they were responsible to use ILE as one of the strategies in their teaching and learning activities. Moreover, I also aimed for key informants at the state and federal level. Thus, the participants' and key informants' words provided meanings and understanding of the factors affecting ILE implementation.

The preliminary conceptual model developed as background to this investigation were employed to help determine basic question content and as a means of encouraging participants to address salient issues related to ILE in their work. The variables of the model were used as a guide in the interview questions. If there is new case material arises from the participant in the interview, the new case material was added to the following participant's interview session. The same process was repeated until there was no more revision of interview protocol needed which was also known as data saturation.

Apart from the qualitative approach, quantitative and mixed methods approaches have been considered for this study. However, both quantitative and mixed methods approaches were seen as unsuitable for answering the research questions. This was because the study attempted to understand the meaning of ILE implementation in the Malaysian primary schools from the participants' perspectives. The qualitative approach was seen to be most relevant to the research issue. The following discussion highlights the criteria of both quantitative and mixed methods approaches that are seen to be unfit to the study.

The quantitative approach seeks to "control and predict phenomena" through the use of the "experimental designs and statistical analysis" (Frankel & Devers, 2000). The quantitative researcher will come to the field with well-defined constructs to measure social reality, instead of understanding people from the inside. The design of the study is stable from start to the end. The findings do not affect the study design. There is no flexibility in the study compared to that of one conducted with a qualitative approach.

Next is the mixed method approach. This is the approach which is used by researchers to base their "knowledge claims on pragmatic grounds" (Creswell, 2009, p.18). It employs the systematic combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection either simultaneously or sequentially to understand the research problems. Greene and Caracelli (1997) believe that

mixed methods can compensate the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methods, increase validity, and obtain a fuller picture of a phenomenon. However, the use of mixed methods approach for this study is not appropriate because it is often used to make up the weaknesses of one of the other methods or to increase the generalisability of the results. Neither of these concerns is relevant to the proposed research.

In this study, I confined to a single approach (that is, qualitative approach) because the best way to identify and understand the factors influencing the implementation of ILE was through the perceptions of the key individuals involved. The study was expected to generate rich detail data of factors affecting ILE which are situated and embedded in the context of Malaysian primary schools. Thus, this study used an emergent, exploratory and inductive approach in which the direction of the investigation was not predetermined.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the purpose of my research is to identify the factors that affect ILE implementation in Malaysian primary schools. Therefore, by adopting the qualitative approach, I was able to be close to the study's participants and to understand how they view their social world, in this case, in school settings, and their role in ILE. It is important to know how different factors in their world interact and affect ILE implementation in schools. To add,I used several data gathering methods to ensure the collection of "information rich" data in order to be able to describe and explain the phenomenon under study (Gorman & Clayton, 2005).

REFERENCES

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches.* (3rd ed.). California: Sage.

Frankel, R. M., & Devers, K. J. (2000). Qualitative research: A consumer's guide. *Education for Health*, 13 (1): 113-123.

Gorman, G. E., & Clayton, P. (2005). *Qualitative research for the information professional: A practical handbook* (2nded.). London: Facet.

Greene, J., & Caracelli, V. (1997). *Advances in mixed methods evaluation: The challenge and benefits of integrating diverse paradigms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Krauss, E. S. (2005). Research paradigms and meaning making: A primer. The Qualitative Report 10(4), 758-770. Retrieved on 31st May 2010, from *http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR10-4/krauss.pdf*

Myers, M. D. (1997). Qualitative Research in Information Systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 21(2): 241-242.

Oka, T., & Shaw, I. (2003).Qualitative research in social work. Retrieved on 25th January , 2011, from *http://pweb.sophia.ac.jp/oka/papers/2000/qrsw/qrsw.html*

Orlikowski, W. J. & Baroudi, J. J. (1991).Studying information technology in organizations: research approaches and assumptions. *Information Systems Research,* 2(1): 1-28.

Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook*. London: Sage.

Wilson, S. (2001). What is an indigenous research methodology? *Canadian Journal of Native Education,* 25 (2): 175-179.