

Philosophy of Quality Knowledge in Qualitative Educational Research

Aurelia Atukwase^{1*}

¹ Oslo Metropolitan University in Affiliation with Kyambogo University, Faculty of Vocational Studies
P.O. Box 1, Kyambogo, Kampala- Uganda, aureatukwase@gmail.com +256 (0) 757 794 904/786 947 178

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Corresponding Author: **Aurelia Atukwase**, Kyambogo University, Faculty of Vocational Studies,
P.O. Box 1, Kyambogo, Kampala- Uganda, aureatukwase@gmail.com +256 (0) 757 794 904/786 947 178

Abstract

Though I do not do qualitative research, I am always occupied with quality knowledge of research in the research field, research I read and use as background material in my own research. My contention here is that as long as scholars still consent to the fact that new knowledge exists, it is also important to think about the quality of such knowledge, understand what makes up quality knowledge and know what exactly limits our knowing. This essay therefore answers the question: How can qualitative educational researchers know that the knowledge generated and shared is valid and reliable? In a bid to answer this overarching question, my philosophical understanding of quality knowledge in qualitative educational research is provided. Whereas the contentions put forth might be worth attention, again one may wonder whether we shall ever know for certain.

Keywords: Philosophy, Quality knowledge, Qualitative Educational Research

1. Introduction

Generally there has been a growing interest by philosophers to understand and reason out what knowledge is, what surrounds knowledge, what makes up knowledge, how is knowledge created, why it is created, as well as the kind of theories within the genre of knowledge (Beista, 2010; Eikeland, 2012; Fulford & Hodgson, 2016). The ever increasing desire to contribute new knowledge to the body of existing knowledge has also made different researchers across the globe to adopt either quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods research approaches in their research processes (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999; Amin, 2005; Oso & Onen, 2009; Cresswell, 2010; Yin, 2014; Silverman, 2013). Moreover, what is still a challenge are diverging concepts, language and beliefs utilized by the community of scholars in the process of explaining what they think quality research should be (Cresswell, 2010). This diversity is often reflected in the criteria established to determine the quality of research by different research fields ranging from quantitative, qualitative to mixed methods (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Beista, 2010; Eikeland, 2012). Moreover the variance in the criteria for determining the quality of research seems to raise a myriad of questions, not only on the nature of knowledge but also on the quality of knowledge itself (Beista, 2010; Cresswell, 2010). This is because what quantitative researchers may consider to be quality research might not be quality when transferred to other research fields and vice versa.

What remains a concern however for this essay is to understand the philosophy of quality knowledge in qualitative educational research. This is because even though I do not do qualitative research myself, I am always occupied with quality knowledge of research in the research field, research I read and use as background material in my own research. Whereas the debate in this essay focuses on qualitative educational researchers, these questions remain critical for both mixed methods and quantitative researchers: i) Does quality knowledge exist? ii) What makes up quality knowledge? What should be put clear from the start is that, this essay neither intends to answer these questions, nor does it intend to persuade philosophers to re-write their theories on knowledge. Apart from promoting the ideology of quality knowledge in the field of research, this essay rather triggers philosophers, researchers and knowers or readers to conduct a knowledge analysis in view of quality (Beista, 2010). My contention here is that as long as the community of scholars (Cresswell, 2010) still consent that new knowledge exists, then it is also important to think about the quality of such knowledge.

To clearly articulate the above questions, the essay bases on the following assumptions: - i) quality knowledge constitutes justifiable evidence; ii) quality knowledge is subjective in nature. This is because what is quality to me might not be quality to you or another person, something that makes justifiable or empirical evidence subjective as well; iii) quality knowledge is situational depending of the purpose of conducting research; iv) quality knowledge depends on a number of factors surrounding the researcher, researched and the knower or reader. The factors may include; biases, interests, beliefs (such as socio-cultural and political), expectations, perceptions, understanding, context and experiences. What is important for readers to underscore about these assumptions is that, they are inter-related. In view of quality knowledge in qualitative educational research, this

means that a single assumption may not provide a comprehensive picture about the nature of knowledge in the research field. What makes up quality knowledge in qualitative educational research? What kind of things can we know about quality knowledge in qualitative educational research? What are limits to what we can know about the philosophy of quality knowledge in qualitative educational research?

Quality knowledge (QK) within the framework of this essay has been conceptualized to mean validity and reliability of the shared knowledge by qualitative educational researchers. It also addresses the question of how qualitative researchers apply these concepts to address pertinent issues in education, not only in Uganda but also the wider research community. This means that quality knowledge in qualitative research should be valued by its functionality (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). Though a number of scholars, including Cresswell (2010) and Yin (2014) provide their conception of validity and reliability, I must declare that their positivist approach leaves me with one option of supporting Maxwell's understanding of validity in qualitative research. Maxwell (1992) describes the concept of validity to include descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalisability, and evaluative validity claiming that what is important in qualitative research is actually not validity but understanding how people think and the notions behind their thinking. Stemming from Maxwell's understanding, I thus posit that quality knowledge is intellectually diverse, bases on one's' understanding, hence not static in nature.

The scope of this essay also permits the use of the concept philosophy interchangeably with theory, ideology, belief and premise. In view of quality knowledge, philosophy addresses epistemological understanding of validity and reliability with attention on knowing why different qualitative educational researchers think the way they think. Can they provide a justification for the knowledge they produce from the philosophical perspective? At this point it is also appealing to declare that apart from promoting the ideology of quality knowledge in qualitative educational research, this essay urges researchers to: - i) become more conscious about what they are reporting or sharing as knowledge with the wider research community. Is what they are sharing worth to be called knowledge? ii) Know that they are not writing for themselves. This means that they should be mindful about the concepts as well as the language they use in the process of sharing knowledge (Cresswell, 2010). Again on the side of knowers, this implies that for them to know the ideology of quality knowledge in qualitative research, they must possess an open mind in order to guard against their preconceived ideas emanating from their cultural and political contexts (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009).

The essay argues that for knowers to know how to judge the quality of knowledge produced by qualitative educational researchers there should be accepted ways of determining quality knowledge within the research field. This even complicates the quest for determining the quality of knowledge in qualitative educational research especially when there are no universally accepted standards by the community of scholars (Cresswell, 2010). Moreover many typical validity challenges in

modern research methodology and philosophy of science are often linked to concepts of theory, methods, experience and their institutional embeddedness (Eikeland, 2012).

The essay further elucidates that the criteria for knowing how to determine and generate quality knowledge can be ontological, epistemological, methodological, and/or product-oriented. However, the debate in this essay uses a methodological lens to understand the philosophies behind qualitative educational researchers' choice of methodologies regarded appropriate to ensure validity and reliability in research. This implies that the one in the position of a researcher needs to understand ethical requirements pertaining to the type of research being conducted (Kennan, 2015). In addition, the researcher has to make sure that research concepts as well as philosophical assumptions are made explicit (Cresswell, 2010), the nature of research questions, methods employed and experiences shared must aim at generating quality knowledge (Reid & Frisby, 2008).

The reason for using a methodological lens to understand the ideology of quality knowledge in qualitative educational research is in tandem with the desire to demystify that it is impossible to discuss quality issues in research without a methodological awareness. Devoid of knowing the procedures one used to ensure that research yields valid conclusions (Silverman, 2013), then there is merely nothing to debate about. This does not imply that I will conduct a meta-analysis of qualitative educational research to establish how different researchers ascertained validity and reliability of their research processes. I am rather grounding my arguments on what scholars so far consider appropriate methods of determining validity and reliability in qualitative research cases (Maxwell, 1992; Silverman, 2013; Yin, 2014). However, what I find challenging is the way scholars have narrowed the scope of validity and reliability to ontological claims for knowledge as if they are the only ways researchers could judge the quality of their research. Yet philosophy is another approach educational researchers could adopt in tackling pertinent issues in education (Fulford & Hodgson, 2016).

Today a number of educational researchers have generated and shared vast knowledge ranging from philosophy of science (Benhabib, 1992), research methodology (Cresswell, 2010) to ethics (Kennan, 2015). However, three of their documentations have not focused on understanding how qualitative educational researchers know that the knowledge they generate and share is valid and reliable. This essay therefore aims at making explicit the philosophy or ideology of quality knowledge in qualitative educational research. The essay answers the question: How can qualitative educational researchers know that the knowledge generated and shared is valid and reliable? In a bid to answer this question, I provide my philosophical understanding of quality knowledge in qualitative educational research. In addition, the challenges encountered by qualitative educational researchers in knowing quality knowledge have been expounded. Finally, the essay suggests some possible ways of knowing quality knowledge by qualitative educational researchers. Whereas the suggestions put forth for knowing what makes up quality knowledge in qualitative research might be worth attention, again one may wonder whether we shall ever know for certain.

2. Philosophical Understanding of Quality Knowledge in Qualitative Educational Research

Qualitative educational researchers have for decades used scientific methods to qualify knowledge as objective based on data generated empirically to the extent that it has become difficult to find other ways of talking about it (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Arguing from the constructivist point of view I believe that knowledge is a human construction based on how qualitative educational researchers co-construct meaning with the social world, hence making validity and reliability relative to purpose and circumstances (Maxwell, 1992; Johson & Gray, 2010). I do not want to agree with some proponents of quantitative and mixed methods researches who expect qualitative researchers to take on the positivist approach (Creswell, 2010; Beista, 2010) even when qualitative research is naturalistic in nature (Silverman, 2013; Maxwell, 1992). The aim is not to counterbalance their critics or to defend the knowledge generated by qualitative researchers but rather to explicably state that there can never be a single way of viewing the world (Fulford & Hodgson, 2016) given its diversity in terms of individuals, social, political and economic contexts (Rizvi, 2011). In other words, if one set out to search for the meaning of validity and reliability whether empirically or theoretically (Johson & Gray, 2010), there are higher chances of getting varied responses depending on how people construct reality based on how they understand their social world. This means that “any account of validity in qualitative research, in order to be productive should begin with an understanding of how qualitative researchers actually think about validity” (Maxwell, 1992, p.282).

In light of the above, qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research is often conceived to be an “intellectually diverse field in which researchers use many different models..... ..andspeak different languages (Silverman, 2013, p.105). The intention here is not to qualify or disqualify this conception as objective or subjective (Fulford & Hodgson, 2016). The objectivity or subjectivity depends on how one decides to view the nature of reality in view of qualitative educational research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Moreover the positivists’ view of reality may not resonate with other schools of thought such as constructivism, post-structuralism and feminism. In this case, I do not want to support or disagree with Silverman (2013) much as the conception may raise both ontological and epistemological questions (Fulford & Hodgson, 2016): What is the nature of qualitative research? Does it change? How does it depend on the perspectives of different researchers who are diverse in their thinking at different times? Are social objects products of how researchers view qualitative educational research through filters of their particular language and culture? In social life how can we know what is real about nature of knowledge generated by qualitative researchers given the intellectual diversity of the research field. On one hand, if one out rightly critically scrutinized the conception advanced by Silverman (2013) as earlier stated, it might appear to mean that the intellectual diversity that lies in the minds of qualitative educational researchers not only influences their choice of models, but also the nature of languages used in the research process.

On the other hand, in relation to the question of ‘quality knowledge’ which is at the centre stage of this essay, Silverman’s conception might also attract a myriad of questions based on the meanings

derived. Firstly, one may question the nature of knowledge generated by qualitative researchers whether it is valid or reliable. Arguing from the post-modernism point of view such knowledge can be regarded perceptual since it is one's cognitive structure that determines how he or she views the world (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Secondly, another person may instead want to understand the philosophies behind the methods used to ascertain validity and reliability of qualitative research (Eikeland, 2012; Silverman, 2013). Besides the empirical methods most qualitative researchers as well as quantitative researchers have often times embraced (Creswell, 2010; Yin, 2014), one may want to explore further how qualitative educational researchers think about the nature of methods used to ensure validity (see Maxwell, 1992) and why they think the way they think (Fulford & Hodgson, 2016).

Interpreting the above two scenarios may also continue to pose an intellectual dilemma basing on how different people understand (Johson & Gray, 2010). For instance, interpretation of the first scenario may largely depend on one's research model in a particular methodology (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). This means that positivists, post-positivists, constructivists, feminists or critical theorists, post structuralists may also have their own interpretations of the same. In addition, a critical theorist may not take what is conceived as truth as actual truth without understanding the social, political and economic settings of both the researcher and the researched (Stromquist, 2015; Pihl, 2015). Further still, a critical theorist may also want to understand the power structures pertaining to the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Reid & Frisby, 2008). Does the position of the researcher versus the researched have anything to do with the quality of knowledge produced by qualitative educational researchers? My intention, here is not to say that some schools of thought are right and others are wrong in their interpretation of social reality but to rather appreciate the fact that truth about the nature of quality knowledge is intellectually diverse (Maxwell, 1992; Silverman, 2013).

In addition, I believe that truth is contextual within the confines of space and time of a researched phenomenon (Fulford & Hodgson, 2016). For instance being a Ugandan by birth and citizenship should not make me think that my truth about the teaching profession in Uganda is truth for other educational contexts world-wide. What is true about Uganda's education system might not be truth in other countries. I would therefore be wrong if I considered knowledge produced by qualitative educational researchers let's say in Europe to be more valid compared to knowledge generated by Africans and vice versa. Well aware that opponents of relativism would tell you that contextualization is nothing but a limitation to knowing, I still stress that contextualizing within the research field remains pertinent as it holds absolute truth for the authors work (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). In relation to this, it implies that for the knowers to produce logic judgments about the nature of truth, they need a clear understanding of both the researched and researchers' context.

However, still commenting on the issue of truth being contextual, it is also important to note that my interpretation might again be relative especially when mirrored from a power structures facet. Critical theorists here would tell you for instance that reality concerning truth about quality

knowledge is related to power not context (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). This is because “the dominant research discourses in a specific historical context, are the “ruling ideas of the ruling class” (Pihl, 2015, p. 45). This means a person in an influential position has the power to cause others to subscribe to his or her reality. A case in point here is Uganda’s current political situation. The President of recent, he succeeded in persuading Members of Parliament from the ruling party to support the amendment of Article 102 (b) of the constitution (age limit matters) if the country is to enjoy steady process. Though the majority of the citizens seemed to protest, their opinions were not respected simply because they are powerless or they are not influential. Drawing you back to the ideology of quality knowledge in qualitative educational research, this means that even the researcher has the ability to not only influence the entire research process but also the nature of knowledge being produced. However, it is also important to note that the “dominance relations and struggles for status in the research community do not facilitate responsiveness to good argument” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 308).

3. Challenges in Knowing Quality Knowledge in Qualitative Educational Research

The approach adopted to discuss the challenges in knowing quality knowledge in qualitative educational research has its roots from Heidegger’s existential hermeneutics which points to the notion that “all understanding from the beginning is ‘always ready’ coloured by emotional moods; there is thus no purely cognitive or rational understanding” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 120). In view of this, existential hermeneuticians went further to suggest ways of counter-balancing issues of preconceived perceptions, conceptions and meanings. However, what is not clear is the extent to which the knowers or what this essay calls readers can guard against their emotional moods. In this essay, therefore, relating to existential hermeneutics, I advance that the challenges in knowing quality knowledge in qualitative educational research are perceptual, contextual, conceptual, theoretical and sometimes methodological in nature.

3.1 Perceptual

Understanding the participants’ perspectives in relation to what is exactly being reported about them is pertinent in any research (Tangen, 2013). However, as an outsider knowing philosophically whether the documentations are true perspectives of participants may pose a serious challenge in terms of validity and reliability. This is because in qualitative research there is always a medial gap between the researcher and researched, making it complex to tell whether the researcher influenced the nature of the shared knowledge or not. Do qualitative educational researchers share knowledge from the participants’ perspective? Or researchers report what they perceive to be a problem based on their experience and institutional embeddedness (Eikeland, 2012). This means that whereas respect for participants’ perspective has the potential of increasing validity and reliability of qualitative research, the reverse can also be true. Yet what remains challenging for an outsider, is knowing whether the knowledge shared was from the researchers’ perspective or participants. This may again call for researchers, researched as well as the knowers to advance more accurate ways of knowledge representation; identity and trust (Pendleburg & Enslin, 2001) so as to avoid possibilities of not knowing what is supposed to known.

3.2 Contextual

Knowing whether the knowledge generated and shared by qualitative educational researchers is valid and reliable, might pose contextual challenges as well (Benhabib, 1992; The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, 2006). For example; a study conducted about behaviour of teachers in a US context may not generate the same knowledge if one conducted a similar study in Uganda. In addition, knowing the quality of knowledge in qualitative educational research might be a contextual challenge if the knowledge shared is intended to influence policy and educational practices within a specific country (Tangen, 2013; Pihl, 2015). What this essay wants to articulate is that most qualitative researchers whether from global north or south, rarely generalize their research findings beyond the researched community (Kulabako, 2013; Kennan, 2015; Pihl, 2015). This means what another research community might consider to be valid and reliable knowledge at a particular time within a given context might not be applicable in a different community. For instance, if a teacher conducted action research with the purpose of improving his or her practice in collaboration with school administration and learners, the findings of such a study can only benefit that particular school community according to space and time. With regard to the ideology of quality knowledge in qualitative research, this also implies that reality about quality knowledge in qualitative educational research is not only perceptual but also contextual.

3.3 Conceptual

It is widely known that researchers whether employing qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approaches often operationalize concepts as used in their studies within a specific context (Amin, 2005; Oso & Onen, 2009; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, Creswell, 2010; Silverman, 2013; Yin, 2014). This means that knowing the quality of shared knowledge may require conceptual knowledge in relation to the philosophy behind the researcher's choice of words to define concepts used in the study (Creswell, 2010). This might also call for 'praxis-based theoria', what is commonly known as knowledge shared in common between thinking individuals through language (Eikeland, 2012). A case in point is a research conducted in local language such as 'Luganda'. In order for one to know whether the knowledge shared is valid and reliable, the knower has to either request for translated version or learn the language. However that is the extreme of conceptual challenges. Another case is where some scholars comfortably use words in their write-ups derived from their native languages. Much as meanings of words could be further expounded, sometimes knowers might find it challenging understanding the original meanings of words as used by researchers. In relation to this, I have always found it complex up to date to understand what (Kouppanou, 2016) meant by the 'Bildung' and so to speak I have failed to apply it in my day to day teaching practices as a mentor. Understanding therefore, how the words used relate to the nature of knowledge shared in terms of generating valid conclusions might seem problematic to lovers of knowledge (Johson & Gray, 2010; Fulford & Hodgson, 2016).

3.4 Theoretical

Sometimes qualitative researchers choose designs such as grounded theory that require them to develop their own theories at the end of the research process (Silverman, 2013; Yin, 2014). What

becomes a challenge for readers or what I have decided to call knowers to know here, is whether the procedures qualitative researchers followed to develop their own theories were valid and reliable. In other words, if one conducted a similar study employing the same methods, is it possible to arrive at the same conclusions and probably develop a similar theory (Creswell, 2010). Another example is where researchers go ahead to explain how they have ensured validity and reliability of their data methodological without explicably stating the reasons behind their thinking from a philosophical perspective (Silverman, 2013; Yin, 2014). Indeed most researchers across the globe whether employing qualitative or quantitative methods hardly explain why they think the way they think in relation to the ideology of quality knowledge (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999; Amin, 2005; Oso & Onen, 2009; Creswell, 2010, Silverman, 2013). On one hand, this leaves the knowers wondering whether the methods used to obtain validity and reliability were backed up by any theory or not. On the other hand, it becomes problematic to know in totality whether the shared knowledge by qualitative educational researchers is valid and reliable.

3.5 Methodological

The challenges of knowing whether the knowledge generated by qualitative educational researchers is valid and reliable seem to have its roots from failure to understand the methodology one employed to generate the knowledge (Yin, 2014). The inadequacy in understanding can be two-fold whereby one might lack general research-based knowledge (Tangen, 2013) in terms of how to judge quality research (Silverman, 2013). The other incidence could be failure to know whether the shared knowledge was arrived at using appropriate research methods based on the position of the researcher in big research picture (Benhabib, 1992; McCall, 2005; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Knowing the position of the researcher in terms of whether one was a constructivist or a poststructuralist helps the knower to judge whether the methods employed to generate knowledge were valid and reliable (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). This is because in general research methodologies, the means always determine the end product of the entire research process (Tangen, 2013). In view of the knower, this might imply the following: - i) necessitate the knower to possess research-based knowledge; ii) critically examine the entire research process (Fulford & Hodgson, 2016); and iii) possess a theoretical attitude or respect the nature of what is studied (Eikeland, 2012).

4. Possible Suggestions for Knowing Quality Knowledge in Qualitative Educational Research

Over the years, ways of knowing have been conceived to include; traditional, practical, tacit, emotional, experimental and intuitive knowledge (Eikeland, 2012). Today these ways of knowing are marginalized and considered insufficient by modern ways of thinking which at times overlook relations between researchers and the ethical aspects (Tangen, 2013; Pihl, 2015). My thinking in this section bases on Eikeland's (2012) work whereby using Aristotle's theory of knowledge provides both theoretical and scientific ways of knowing from a wide lens perspective. In this essay, however, I build on Eikeland's work to provide alternative ways of knowing quality knowledge in qualitative educational research from a philosophical perspective. The essay thus suggests that for one to know whether the knowledge generated and shared by qualitative educational researchers is

valid and reliable there is need to possess research-based knowledge, be able to critically analyze the qualitative research process and own knowledge about research ethics and their importance in generating quality knowledge.

4.1 Qualitative Research-based Knowledge

Possessing research-based knowledge about how qualitative researchers think about validity and reliability is a starting point for knowing the nature of the knowledge they produce (Yin, 2014). This means that to produce sound judgments about quality knowledge necessitates an understanding of not only empirical methods qualitative educational researchers' use (Creswell, 2010; Yin, 2014) but also the philosophies behind the choices they make (Fulford & Hodgson, 2016). For instance some proponents of qualitative research think that validity and reliability aspects are relative (Maxwell, 1992; Silverman, 2013), yet opponents think that the knowledge generated through qualitative research is subjective. Nevertheless, without knowing that knowledge generated by both quantitative and qualitative researchers' bears 'some truth' might result into unclear or false judgments (Johnson & Gray, 2010). In addition, a comprehension of knowledge constituents can also aid qualitative researchers in knowing quality knowledge. This is because knowing that knowledge comprises of beliefs that can be justified either empirically or theoretically (Fulford & Hodgson, 2016), helps knowers to construct their own reality about quality knowledge. In other words, what they construe as reality about the nature of quality knowledge in qualitative research is their reality (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). However, bearing in mind the refutability principle as put by Silverman (2013), it is important for knowers to also acknowledge that 'the world does not tolerate all understandings of it equally' (p.289). Implying that as qualitative educational researchers, in search for knowing how to know, we must also seek to refute assumed relations between phenomena, unless we have tested those assumptions beyond reasonable doubt. This also means that no one should persuade qualitative educational researchers to believe what they do not understand (Maxwell, 1992). Moreover, in my view, all that we are able to research about, read, write and share as knowledge are nothing but representations of how different people understand.

4.2 Critical Analysis of the Qualitative Research Process

A critical analysis of the entire research process from the beginning to the end is paramount in judging the quality of any research (Creswell, 2010; Silverman, 2013; Tangen, 2013). It is therefore important for knowers to become critical of the research process, starting from the time of planning, actual data collection to the reporting stage. Firstly, the one in the position of knowing should seek to understand how the researcher handled the planning stage:- i) What was the nature of research ___was it qualitative or quantitative research? ii) What was the underlying premise for the study? iii) What was the research problem? iv) Under which context was the problem studied? v) What was the purpose of conducting research? vi) What was the nature of research questions? vii) Was there a relationship between the purpose of the research and the problem being investigated? Secondly, the reader needs to critically analyze entire methodology that was adopted by the qualitative researcher to generate data. In this sense, the knower should seek to know: i) Was the methodological framework adopted in tandem with the research purpose and questions? ii) Did the

researcher employ naturalistic or constructionist approaches? iii) What kind of research instruments did the researcher use to collect data? iv) What was the sampling procedure? v) How did the researcher analyze data? Did the researcher cater for ethical principles throughout the research process? Lastly, at the reporting stage the reader needs to understand the following: How did the researcher present findings? Which language did the researcher use while reporting the situation on ground? This implies that the person who is seeking to know is obliged to be critical of the entire qualitative research process, if he or she is to produce value judgments about the nature of knowledge generated by researchers within the research field (Silverman, 2013; Tangen, 2013).

In view of the above, what remains central for the knower is a clear understanding of the purpose, context well as the philosophy behind each stage of the research process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Johson & Gray, 2010). For instance the purpose could be; to investigate the teachers' role in addressing gender inequalities in TVET institutions in Uganda". In this case, the underlying premise could be stated as thus: There are gender inequalities in TVET institutions and therefore teachers have a role to play towards addressing them. Upon understanding the research purpose and assumption guiding the study, one should be in position to evaluate the quality of the research problem in relation to the methodological framework adopted by the researcher. Is the researcher a constructivist or a critical theorist? Knowing the position of a researcher would be pertinent in understanding why a given researcher uses certain concepts (Benhabib, 1992), and a specific language to explain the nature of reality being studied (Eikeland, 2012).

4.3 Knowledge about Research Ethics and their Importance in Acquiring Quality Knowledge

It is argued that "by considering ethical issues from the conceptual stage of a proposal, the quality of research is enhanced" (The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, 2006, p. 8). This means that in efforts to know whether the knowledge shared by qualitative educational researchers is valid and reliable, it is cardinal to understand how ethics were treated in the overall research process (Kennan, 2015). The knower should seek to find out whether the researcher was ethically sensitive and consistent (The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, 2006) while addressing three domains of ethics as described by Tangen (2013). In addition, it is important for one in the position of knowing to possess knowledge about the existing principles of ethics and how they are likely to influence the quality of research (Silverman, 2013; Wearing, 2015). Finally, it is pertinent for one to know whether qualitative researchers address 'theoretical ethics' in ensuring ethical sensitivity and consistency (Tangen, 2013; Pihl, 2015). What therefore remains important to note is that possessing knowledge about research ethics is central in knowing whether the knowledge generated by qualitative educational researchers is valid and reliable.

5. Conclusion

The idea in this essay complements the body of knowledge pertaining to research in educational philosophy with specific attention to the ideology of quality knowledge in qualitative educational

research. The essay urges qualitative educational researchers to view quality knowledge in terms of epistemological validity and reliability. This is because over the years the general quality of qualitative research has been viewed from an ontological perspective; yet qualitative research is naturalistic in nature. Whereas it is paramount for qualitative researchers to approach the ideology of quality knowledge epistemologically, I cannot guarantee that challenges in knowing whether the knowledge they generate is valid or not will not arise. Moreover the challenges might be a combination of several perceptual, contextual, conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues in the research field. This essay therefore concludes by suggesting possible ways of knowing quality knowledge in qualitative educational research. These include; possession of research-based knowledge, ability to critically analyze the qualitative research process as well as possession of knowledge about research ethics and their importance in generating quality knowledge.

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