Importance Of Ontology And Epistemology For Research Design

1) Discuss the importance of ontology and epistemology for research design, illustrating your answer with reference to one ontological and epistemology position.

All social researchers have their own philosophical stance when it comes to conducting research, this refers to the ways in which the researchers formulate their worldview on social reality which is based on Ontology and Epistemology which are the two philosophical influences. It is significant for researchers to undertake an Ontological approach as this is fundamental for the beginning of the research design. This is because it seeks to find out what fabricates social reality and investigates what is currently existent in the metaphysical world. One of the Ontological positions would be Objectivism which views individuals as independent entities that externally differ from the social world. Thus, society is unable to be explained through human senses and experiences due to its complexity. This position advocates for empirical based data whereby natural laws of society should be founded and explained as a way of constructing social reality. Similarly, the researcher must utilise quantifiable methods as well as have an inductive approach during the research design as this will focus on testing theory whereby social phenomena is explained through the top-down approach where social reality governs human behaviour which further demonstrates why Objectivism is needed. Alternatively, Researchers must also take on an Epistemological approach which is important as this seeks to find out what knowledge counts as valid and truthful. One example can be linked to Interpretivism which argues that social reality is based on personal meanings attached by social actors which differ historically, culturally and socially. Thus, this encourages researchers to utilise more qualitative research methods which will affect the research design as they will need to use methods to uncover people's interpretations of social phenomena which are more open-ended and subjective rather than based on scientific knowledge. This incorporates a bottom-up approach where the individual assembles society through a shared consensus of meaning.

2) What is validity and why is it important in assessing quality in a research design?

The term 'Validity refers to how accurately a method measures what it is intended to measure' (Base and difference? 2020) this refers to how authentic the research method and data collection produced is. This is further reinforced by Denscombe's (2010) 'Ground Rules for Good Social Research' whereby he establishes a blueprint for research that researchers must adhere to, which acts as a framework that ensures their research is done with integrity, feasibility and accuracy as well as being ethical. As an illustration, Procacci – (1991) claimed that white middle-class researchers have a strong fascination with poor vulnerable individuals in which they must render their participants visible. This is because of the fact they seek to re-moralise these poor groups through pathologizing them as well as portraying them through negative discourages utilising the terms 'underclass' which is detrimental. So, this

demonstrates the researcher's prejudices as being discriminatory and distorts their research findings which undermine validity. Therefore, to overcome this they must be value-neutral. Alternatively, the researcher must utilise different types of validity which is dependent on the methods chosen. These include measurement validity which questions whether measures are a reflection of concepts, internal validity which seeks causal relationships, external validity where findings are generalisable to the wider population and lastly ecological validity where the research must be transferable to our natural environment.

3) Theory should always come before research. Discuss.

The theory has a key role in social research as ''it is an explanatory system that discusses how a phenomenon operates and why it operates as it does'' (Creswell. P. 120). This Is beneficial and should be undertaken before research as it will count towards our contribution of knowledge. This is due to the fact that the theories can be evaluated whereby the researchers are able to either criticise the theory by their new founded knowledge through their chosen topic of interest. Nonetheless, as theory is able to explain the natural and social world through empirical-based data, observations and laws the researchers are able to gain a deeper grasp on the different methods utilised as well as the flaws and challengers' other researchers have faced. Consequently, this ensures the researcher has the best positionality to conduct their research and mitigates the failures of research. On the other hand, it can be problematic to utilise some theories as they are derived and dominated by white male discourses. As a result of this researchers must ensure they speak on behalf of powerless groups as well as select theories that are diverse in nature. For instance, researchers may use grand theories as part of their research design as it incorporates a broad framework that explains human behaviour in a variety of settings. This is illustrated through Rational choice theory whereby individuals have a cost-benefit analysis that governs their actions as they seek to maximise pleasure and personal gain. However, there is a conflict between the two approaches as to whether theory does come before approach this is demonstrated through an inductive approach where researchers utilise a well-known theory and centre their research on it by providing evidence as well as taking a deductive approach where researchers examine a problem and find a causal explanation for it. So, it is argued that theory should come before research as it allows the researcher to expand on the theorist's knowledge or criticise it.

References

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