

## **Emergent Paradigms in Malaysian Qualitative Research: Deliberations**

**(Draft)**

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*Research in Malaysia is as is elsewhere, diverse. The traditional positivist and non-positivist paradigms have long been at opposite poles. However, a form of 'mixed methods' approach is fast gaining popularity. This in turn has begun to give rise to a concoction of ideas to conduct qualitative research. With each researcher possessing their own individual foundations in their respective field it is difficult to avoid pride and prejudices as well as possessing strong opinions about research paradigms. Nevertheless, there seems to be emerging paradigms which have a mixed flavour of several original independent paradigms which are apparently driven by misconceptions, research objectives and questions, choice of instruments, needs, fears, types of data, data analysis and public demands. Data sources for the paper came from open-ended questionnaires during qualitative research seminars, interviews with experts, dissertations and discussions with post-graduate students. This paper will deliberate upon these emergent paradigms.*

### **Traditions of Qualitative Research**

Why does one truly desire to conduct qualitative research? Probably it is because descriptions of the phenomenon being studied was hoped for, in order to acquire an emic perspective and to understand the phenomenon investigated in its natural context. Descriptions should include the research site, the participants at the site, events and activities that take place, the sequence of events that occur, time and moments, the surroundings or ambience, pictures, other graphics as well as focus upon meaning and not just frequency of events. The qualitative researcher aims for the emic perspective that is, as the phenomenon is experienced by the participants of

the study, the phenomenon as is stated by the participants and understood by the participants and not as seen, thought, understood, known or assumed by the researcher. The natural situation means, that the phenomenon should not in any way be changed because of the researcher's presence, no interference from the researcher, should be taking place in real time and the research site should already be in existence and should not be specially created for the research.

It must be noted before reading the rest of the paper that the authors adhere and believe firmly in the above.

### **Beginnings...**

The Hawthorne studies represent an interesting point in time, in that it is related to the development of research processes in the social sciences in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Kerlin, 2000). The Western Electric Company in Chicago was the site of these investigations between 1927 – 1932 conducted by Elton Mayo and his team. A 'scientific' experimental approach was used in these investigations to explore the appropriate intensity of industrial lighting and the effect upon production output. Curiously, a strange occurrence was noticed, that is the workforce altered their ways of working because they knew they were being watched. Hence, the Hawthorne effect was uncovered. Researchers had to begin to rethink the ideas of experimentation and external observations. Therefore realism that exhorts reality exists independent of the observer that is the subject-object dualism was questioned (Smith, 1983). Idealism, that argues what is investigated is not independent of the process of investigation began to gain prominence. Dilthey (in Smith, 1983) has argued that the complexity of

the social world changes over time and cultural differences would make it impossible to discover laws as in the physical sciences. However, even in the scientific world, Kuhn's Theory of Scientific Revolutions (1962) displaced the positivistic interpretation of science as the basic understanding of science. The theory questioned the philosophy of science as a legitimate scholarly endeavour. The theory also opened avenues for historians to exploit the methodologies of anthropologists and sociologists in studying the history of science in order to challenge scientists' own accounts of their work (Tobey, 2002). Since then an increasing amount of time and energy have been invested in interpretive research (as qualitative research is often referred to) as well as also being labeled as naturalistic inquiry.

### **Qualitative Research Paradigms**

Since Thomas Kuhn's original work on the "paradigm revolution" in the 1960s, the word "paradigm" has been used in numerous ways (Reyes, 2002).

*A paradigm is an interpretive framework or a set of beliefs that guide action. It is a "net of epistemological and ontological premises which - regardless of ultimate truth or falsity - become partially self validating" Thus, paradigm refers to the focus of research and related ways of approaching inquiry. (Reyes, 2002, p.1)*

Basically two paradigms have been discussed by Reyes (2002), that is positivist (objectivist) and post-positivist (subjectivist). The positivist believes that the inquirer (knower) and the object of inquiry (known) are independent and findings of positivist inquiries are true. Whereas the post-positivist believes that the inquirer (knower) and the object of inquiry (known) are not wholly separate ("subjectivists") or inseparable

("radical relativists/subjectivists") and the findings of post-positivist inquiries are probably true. However Reyes (2002) cautions that this dualism may be oversimplified.

Therefore, apart from that, underlying the whole processes of doing qualitative research are the principles and philosophical beliefs that constitute the paradigm and world view – a world view of a qualitative research which frequently referred to as naturalistic. A world view that has challenged the empirical world view which claims scientific research as absolute, particularly within the past few decades. Those who work within the naturalistic paradigm operate from a set of axioms that hold realities to be multiple and shifting, that take for granted a simultaneous mutual shaping of knower and known, and that see all inquiry, including the empirical, as being inevitably value-bound (Ely et al. 1991,p. 2).

However implications of post-positivist world-view for qualitative inquiry have given rise to distinct characteristics unique to itself. Researchers involved in post-positivist research tend to be guided by the assumptions identified in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Characteristic	Description
Research Done in Field (Natural) Setting as well as prolonged engagement at the site	The researcher carries out research in the field--in the natural setting--to develop contextual ("context-rich") and in-depth understandings.
Human Instrumentation	The researcher(s) uses herself/himself as the primary data-gathering instrument instead of so-called "objective" instruments such as tests.

Table 1 ( <i>ctd.</i> )	
Characteristic	Description
Non-Random (Purposive, Theoretical, or Representative) Sampling	Because their interest in developing in-depth, contextual understandings about a particular topic or issue, qualitative researchers are more concerned about "internal validity" than "external validity." Thus, the researcher is willing to sacrifice breadth ("random sampling") for "depth" (purposive, theoretical, or representative sampling).
Open-Ended, Emergent Design	Researcher tends to use an open-ended design such that important understandings/insights are not foreclosed and overlooked. For example, research questions may be substantially modified during the course of the study and one's sample of interviewees may be likewise modified. Discovery oriented.
Grounded (Inductive) Generalizations/Theory	While some articulated theoretical notions (theory, perspective, assumptions) may guide research, understandings and generalizations are primarily grounded in the data collected and analyzed. Further studies may be used for verification.
Qualitative Research is Descriptive	Data are in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. Data include interview notes and transcripts, field notes, photographs, documents, memos, videotapes
"Sense making" is the Primary Focus	Qualitative researchers are interested in "meaning-making," i.e., the ways in which people make sense of their worlds.
Inductive and Deductive Data Analysis	Although variously informed by theoretical notions, data are generated inductively and tested deductively in an ongoing or "dialectical" process.
Characteristic	Description
Negotiated Interpretations	In varying degrees, researchers invite "interviewees" to participate in the data analysis, that is, in developing as well as testing understandings / interpretations / generalizations

Table 1 ( <i>ctd.</i> )	
Characteristic	Description
Tentativeness in Generalizing	To the extent they generalize, researchers are likely to be tentative in reporting on the "generalizability" of their findings.
Case Study/Multiple-Case Study Reporting Mode	In contrast to traditional reporting, many researchers use narratives and "stories" to present their "findings."
Multi-Vocality in Reporting	In reporting their findings, researchers are included to represent the diverse voices of multi-positioned "interviewees" through stories, narratives, and quotations.
Reporting: Textual Voice	Some researchers are careful to distinguish their voices from those of their "subjects," and some inform readers of who they are as "positioned subjects."
Evaluation	Traditional evaluation criteria, such as validity and reliability are still stressed though their form may change shape [many members of critical, constructivist and postmodern schools of thought reject these criteria in the evaluation of their work, preferring alternative methods such as multi-voiced texts, personal responsibility, verisimilitude, etc.

Source: Reyes (2002), p-3-9

Therefore researchers come with individual ideologies and philosophical positions which can be considered to be their paradigms from which they work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). From this paradigm a researcher interprets whatever is seen and felt. Positivism, Constructivism and Interpretivism are thought to be common paradigms among researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Are there any more paradigms? Does a researcher need to work from a single or should multiple paradigms be used in carrying out research? These concerns have been voiced by Greene and Caracelli, 1997, Baptiste (2001), states that most qualitative researchers

inevitably are guided by a single or multiple paradigms which apparently will help improve the quality of research. Denzin (1994) put his thoughts about paradigms as follows

*A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the "world," the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as, for example, cosmologies and theologies do. The beliefs are basic in the sense that they must be accepted simply on faith (however well argued); there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness. (Denzin 1994, p. 107)*

### **Malaysia: Through the years...**

Qualitative research conjures up many ideas, feelings and questions whenever it is mentioned in Malaysia. Without fail, (as it is elsewhere) most would compare qualitative with quantitative research and say that 'quantitative is about numbers and qualitative is mainly description. Most researchers seem to be able to conceptualize a form of qualitative research only in contrast to quantitative research. This may be because of the individual field of expertise and paradigms that one may have acquired over the years. The familiar sneer and scorn about qualitative methodology has perhaps become a little less, as the many positive points and advantages of qualitative research becomes more apparent slowly.

In a recent study (Marohaini Yusoff, Zulkifli A. Manaf, Hawa Rohany, Rosmimah Mohd Roslin & Hafidz Omar, 2004) among 251 respondents (120 academics, 20 Ph.D students and 103 Master's students) from three local universities, two main questions were investigated. First, the level of understanding of qualitative

research was investigated. Second, the level of adoption of qualitative research among the respondents was evaluated. Data was collected using questionnaires.

The study gave some indication of the extent of knowledge and understanding that the academic community has pertaining to qualitative inquiry (Table 2).

**Table 2: Comparison of Responses on Understanding of Qualitative Research Concepts**

<b>Concept of qualitative research</b>	<b>Percentage of responses which shows understanding</b>
More Meaningful Data	65.0%
Realistic Investigation	48.0%
Naturalistic Inquiry	48.8%
Emic Perspectives	60.5%
Conducting Observations	71.0%
Document analysis	52.4%
Ethnography	62.1%
Phenomenology	46.6%
Reflecting upon events	48.3%
Use of Field notes	57.0%
Use of Transcripts	71.0%
<b>Percentage of responses which indicates lack of understanding</b>	
What kind of objectives are suitable	<b>59.3%</b>
The use of Statistics	<b>52.4%</b>
Need to put forward Hypotheses at the beginning	<b>37.1%</b>
Conducting Fieldwork	<b>68.4%</b>
Questionnaires can be utilized	<b>57.0%</b>
Involves some instrumentation	<b>53.0%</b>
Emerging Grounded Theory	<b>67.7%</b>

Source: Adapted from Marohaini Yusoff, et al., 2004

Generally the respondents appear to relate field observations (71%) and transcripts (71%) with qualitative research. However many still believe that qualitative research will involve questionnaires (57%) and some sort of



instrumentation (53%). In addition 52.4% believe that qualitative research involves some sort of statistics. The emergence of Grounded Theory is also not well understood by the respondents.

Results of the study revealed that only 45 percent of the respondents were current users of qualitative research methods. This was considered to be only a small percentage in the Institutes of Higher Learning participating in the study. Therefore adoption of qualitative research is still not as widespread as desired (Table 3 referred).

**Table 3: Cross-tabulation of Users of Qualitative Research Methods and Respondents' Academic Stature**

		Users		Total
		No	Yes	
Respondents	Academic staff	54	48	102
	PhD candidates	7	11	18
	Master's students	53	33	86
Total		114	92	206

Source: Marohaini Yusoff, et al., 2004

Table 2 indicates that 40 percent of the academic staff, 55 percent of the Ph. D students and 32 percent of the master's students have adopted qualitative research approaches.

The paper will now turn to deliberate some emerging paradigms driven by (i) 'misconceptions' about instruments, research design and data analysis and (ii) the researcher's needs and fears based on the pride and prejudices in one's own field.

## **Emerging paradigms upon ‘misconceptions’**

The authors have decided to use the term ‘misconceptions’ to only describe certain selected ideas about qualitative research which are rather well accepted by many and corporated into the quantitative paradigm in order to collect additional qualitative data. These selected ideas in this paper are defined as ideas about qualitative research that is in direct contrast to the traditional beliefs of qualitative research as in Table 1. The authors have had various encounters with students and colleagues countless times over the past three years and have documented parts of their conversations in these encounters. Many a time, colleagues who are clearly of the quantitative paradigms, have stated that *“Any one of us is capable of guiding a master’s level student in a quantitative study”* (Eaxminers meeting, October, 2000). Be as it may, many a student of these colleagues have come away with checklists to observe in a ‘qualitative’ study of teaching behaviours in a classroom or a student conducts several interviews and carries out analyses according to pre-determined categories, thus missing the ‘emergent’ characteristic of a qualitative study. Also is the researcher imposing his or her own ideas and opinions upon the data being collected? The emerging paradigms from these personal encounters with misconceptions are discussed below in two parts, namely (i) instruments, and research design, and (ii) analyses and data presentation.

### Research objectives, research design and data analyses

This section will be discussed by describing three encounters below.

Encounter 1: *“I am using mixed methods for my study” (Qualitative research seminar, for higher degree students Faculty of Education, University of Malaya June 2001)*

The words above was what one of our Masters students explained to us about her study where the objective was to investigate critical thinking skills. When asked to explain, she had used one questionnaire to obtain quantitative data (one administration) about the critical thinking skills ability and an achievement test in science in a quasi experimental study involving a control and an experimental group. In addition some qualitative data had been collected via audio recordings of verbal interactions of students working on science problems. The number of times the recordings were made was for about six times (six one hour sessions). These recordings were transcribed and analyzed into pre-determined categories. The students were not interviewed face to face.

What is the paradigm here? The idea of qualitative research seems to be the use of quantitative and qualitative measures in her data collection. Her ‘qualitative approach’ did not however involve any kind of prolonged engagement with the students, nor did it involve probing of the student’s minds. It was just non-participant observation of discourse among students that occurred. Hence the use of a qualitative measure such as observations, justified the study as a mixed research method study. The student as a researcher also did not seem to view himself as the ‘instrument’ that could gather invaluable data in the study. This paradigm is very widely accepted as qualitative research.

Encounter 2: “I have used a random sample in my qualitative study” (Submitted Abstract, First QR Convention, University of Malaya, August 2001)

Based on traditional ideas of qualitative research, if participants were selected randomly, the qualitative researcher would not be able to obtain the data needed to understand and unfold the phenomenon being investigated. It is pertinent that would be qualitative researchers spend some time with the participants, to get to know them, and create some rapport, and slowly ease themselves into the participants daily life. In a qualitative study, the researcher’s stance towards the people they work with is as follows,

*I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (Spradley, 1979, P. 34)*

A distinctive feature of a qualitative enquirer is that he or she is the main research instrument who will have to interact and be constantly making decisions on many aspects and processes of collecting and analyzing data. To be able to behave qualitatively, a qualitative enquirer not only have to be knowledgeable of the technical aspects, but also have to be **able to juggle and balance the** intellectual and emotional involvement in what they seek to learn and understand.

Selecting a ‘random’ sample for a ‘qualitative study’ is of course in direct contrast to the idea of breadth and not depth as is required for a traditional qualitative study where the participants are the experts on the phenomenon studied. Can a

qualitative researcher learn about a phenomenon if the subjects of the study are not willing to express themselves candidly and be a willing participant?

The sentence above was found in an abstract submitted to a paper selection committee for a recent international convention. The abstract was rejected as the committee deemed it to be unsuitable as a qualitative study. However, the author of the abstract argued that some interviews had been conducted with the subjects and that this justifies the classification of the study as a qualitative study. This paradigm, as the first, where as long as some form of qualitative measure such as interviews are used, is generally considered as a qualitative study, and is quite prevalent among researchers in Malaysia.

Encounter 3: *“I have used interviews, observations and document analysis. Therefore my study is a qualitative study” (Vetting of Ph. D proposal, December 2002)*

This kind of statement is common among most of our post-graduate students. Once again the use of qualitative research techniques is taken to be synonymous to doing qualitative research. Many researchers label their study as qualitative if some qualitative techniques such as observations, document analysis or interviews are conducted. These techniques are indeed main techniques in qualitative research. **However, the use of these techniques depends upon the way they are used in the collection of data.** If a researcher uses a set of questions and presents it to the participant and does not probe further based upon any keyword/keypoints stated by the interviewee, then we can say that it becomes a questionnaire which is

administered by means of a face-to-face interview. This will also result in the researcher not getting the detail and depth of the issues or ideas being under study and being probed, as the researcher instead of trying to get the emic perspective, may be imposing his or her ideas onto the participant rather than trying to look for emerging ideas.

One thing that is clear is that a interview is a purposeful conversation (or a conversation with a purpose) usually aimed to get information, to learn to see the world from the eyes of the people being interviewed and not from the interviewer (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) Therefore the effectiveness of the interview lies upon the questions asked, and the way the interview is conducted, such as the number of times the interview is conducted. If it is only once or twice, can it be called a qualitative study? Can one or two sessions of interviews provide the researcher with enough information? What about validity and reliability of information? The tasks of a qualitative interviewer also include providing focus, observing, giving direction, being sensitive to clues given by participants, probing, questioning, listening, amalgamating statements and generally being as involved as possible. At their most useful, interviews are interwoven dances of questions and answers in which the researcher follows as well as leads.” (Ely, 1984, p4-5)

Observations are also similar. Observations as defined by Lofland and Lofland (1984) “...always involves the interweaving of looking and listening... of watching and asking, as well as recording, in video, tape recorded or making notes – and some of that listening and asking may approach or be identical to intensive

interviewing. Similar to interviewing, observations also involve repeated and prolonged contact between researcher and informants over a period of time – another characteristic often considered as a hallmark of participant observation in qualitative study. Therefore if it is done only once or twice, it would not be appropriate to classify the study as a qualitative study but rather as using qualitative measures or techniques to get more details and insight on the phenomenon studied. One more thing is that observations conducted must be in the context of which the phenomenon is studied. Therefore conclusions made must be based upon the emerging data which is grounded in the contexts of the phenomenon. Therefore if a researcher comes to a classroom with a checklist of things to be observed, the data collected do not reflect the real context but what the researcher has brought to the context in which the phenomenon is studied. The researcher is recording what he or she wants to see rather what is there (emerging). In the process of observation, a researcher sees, hears and notes down what is really happening and not what is being assumed by him or her. The following is a list of nine major dimensions of social situations that might be used in the beginning phase to pose and guide observation (Spradley, 1980, p. 78): (i) Space: the physical place/places, (ii) Actor: the people involved, (iii) Activity: of related acts people do, (iv) Object: the physical things that present, (v) Act: single action that people do, (vi) Event: a set of related activities that people carry out, (vii) Time: the sequencing that takes place over time, (viii) Goal: the things people are trying to accomplish and (ix) Feeling: the emotion felt and expressed

Another characteristic that is related to the investigator and the phenomenon under investigation is prolonged engagement of the researcher in the context. One time interviews may not reveal the characteristics of what really or normally takes place everyday. The subjects might be a putting on a show for the benefit of the researcher. In qualitative research, prolonged engagement is very important as a means of validity and reliability as well as being a helpful in constructing a view of the context in its natural state (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Qualitative research demands "...sufficient involvement at the site to overcome misinformation, ...to uncover constructions, and to facilitate immersing oneself in and understanding the contexts' culture (p. 237). Therefore the qualitative researcher needs time to carry out collection of data – in fact even 2-3 months in the field can be considered short to carry out an holistic study that can be accepted and trusted (Ely et al, 1991, p. 51).

#### *The analysis and presentation of qualitative data?*

Encounter 4: *"What is so difficult in analyzing qualitative data. I just use NUDIST and I can do it very fast". "What software did you use to identify the themes?(Review of Masters Courses Meeting, October, 2003)*

The idea that software for qualitative analysis is as swift as quantitative analysis software is prevalent among researchers. If only analyzing qualitative data is that simple. As all qualitative researchers know analysis of data begins with the first interview or observations recorded. This means constant and continuing on-going analysis have to be done in order to establish some direction as to obtain some early understanding of what, who, where and how is the phenomenon being investigated. In



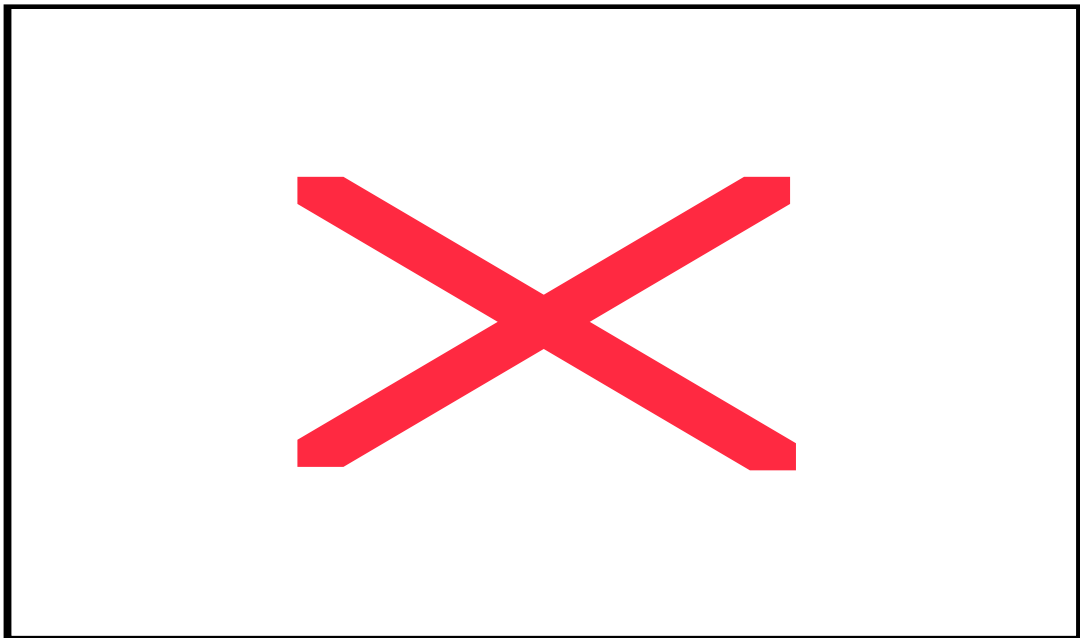
order to do this, field notes related to the observations, journals, log books, or interviews (interviews should be transcribed daily) must be complete as possible; reading of the data must be done repeatedly (circle, highlight, underline, make short notes at the margin) as it is collected which will help in the early coding and categorization of data. In order to code you must write down your first impressions, try to determine relationships among data, continuously explore literature, experiment with themes and ideas along the long and winding way. After the initial categorization the researcher will have to carry out member checks or have a panel of experts comment upon the codes. In short it is a mentally demanding process and a time consuming one. Is having the NUDIST software enough for analysis? Perhaps for managing the data but for deeper analysis nothing can replace the researcher's minds to dwell upon emerging themes.

### **Paradigm 1: Summary**

From the above discussion about misconceptions about doing qualitative research what come through is that many researchers in Malaysia believe they are conducting qualitative research if certain qualitative data collection techniques such as interviews and field observations are included in their research design. Their understanding is that obtaining and analysing qualitative data via qualitative data collection techniques is equivalent to conducting qualitative research. This paradigm is widespread and the authors of this paper have had many a debate with academics concerning this paradigm.

## **Emerging Paradigms based on researcher's needs, fears, pride and prejudice**

Many a researcher and higher degree students face what the authors call the quantitative prejudice. The quantitative researchers feel that statistical data is empirical data and therefore able to prove a hypothesis or otherwise. Qualitative data on the other hand is just descriptive and cannot be generalised. In addition reliability of quantitative data is easily attained. Figure 1 shows the problems that is faced, being in mainly a quantitative environment.



**Figure 1: Problems Faced by the Academic Community**  
(Source: Adapted from Marohaini Yusoff et al., 2004)

Perhaps the reason for the misconceptions above may arise from the problems shown in Figure 1. Lack of supervisors trained in the qualitative field to supervise higher degree students and to teach methodology courses may have given rise to emerging paradigms that indicate a deficiency in understanding of qualitative research but

somehow seem accepted generally in the academic circle. Besides this, lack of trained and experienced qualitative supervisors can lead to unsuccessful data analyses which may lack depth and insight. The technical support is referring to analysis software.

With reference to the results in Figure 1, in an interview carried out with a local anthropologist and a local sociologist, they had this to say,

*“..in my faculty .the statistical software is there but not the qualitative software.”*

*“...no transcriber... we don't have the facilities.”*

*Anthropologist, (Interview conducted in January, 2004)*

*“...it's not like quantitative, quantitative you can almost teach yourself get a good Stat book, get a manual, right and you can just sit down and do it. But qualitative no, I think you really need someone to help you, just understand the perspective, understand what kind of data it is that you are going to be able to get and than how to use the data and even actually to be, another problem for me would be the lack of good example of qualitative research.”*

*(Sociologist, Interview conducted in February, 2004)*

An academic attending a seminar said,

*“QR is Subjective in nature. Based on observations. Do not rely on facts and figures. Difficult to analyse.”*

*(An academic, Participant at a Qualitative Analysis Seminar, May 2004)*

There are other problems faced by the local researchers. In an interview with a sociologist, she had the following to say,

*“But sad to say organization behavior companies out there they do not at all like numbers; I supposed they deal with numbers. So, what happens? When I was doing my PhD, and still, Il always combine interviews and the survey but I still haven't done what you call a proper qualitative research.”*

*“actually to be quite honest I can carry on in my area of research **without** the qualitative component, customers no, publishers no, you know **everyone is quite happy without it.**”*  
*((Interview conducted in February, 2004))*

The above excerpt points to the fact that the field of sociology preferred only quantitative research and that is why the researcher tended to use quantitative and qualitative measures in the collection of data but never really had the ‘proper’ approach such as prolonged engagement on site.

*“I think there is very many brands of qualitative research; Anthropologists, their brand of qualitative research is very old and it’s been happening for a very long time and it is more or less, they are already settled into their way of doing it. This is what I am saying, people have got a different brand and they move, settled into their right kind of thing, so there is a lot of that going on, sometimes the students they do some very good work with these people My brand of qualitative research which uses computer programmes and Grounded Theory and those kinds of things is unheard of!”*  
*((Interview conducted in February, 2004))*

Once again the sociologist felt that the ‘traditional’ understanding of qualitative research is only found among researchers in certain fields. In her field some ideas of qualitative research seemly do not fit in

*“Publication is a big problem because I know that the major psychology journal would probably reject it.” “I can safely say that even local journal like Psychology from ..... would probably look at the qualitative paper and say “What this?”” “There is a recent one Asian Journal of Socio-Psychology you would think that Asian Socio-Psychology would cry out for qualitative but every single articles is quantitative.”*  
*“Perhaps another reason why I don’t do much qualitative research.”*  
*((Interview conducted in February, 2004))*

Every academic needs to publish. Therefore when one faces problems in disseminating one's research it poses a serious problem in how one conducts research. Hence the rising of the 'mixed methods' approach.

Students of higher degree often shun from qualitative research because they fear the validity and the reliability of their study. Based upon the data in Figure 1, there is a lack of examiners who understand qualitative research and usually examiners who are of the qualitative paradigm are asked to examine qualitative research. A student said,

*"...many feel that the qualitative approach is difficult because it is very hard to verify and to convince readers of the reliability of the study."  
(Ph. D student, Interview February, 2004*

Another student said,

*"QR is time consuming to conduct. I've heard that a thesis conducted qualitatively would be difficult to defend compared to is it were using the Quantitative Approach."  
(Ph. D student, Participant at a Qualitative Analysis Seminar, May 2004)*

Many academics view that quantitative and qualitative research complement each other,

*"QR should be a complementary method to Quantitative Research because of its high sociological validity, richness of data etc."  
(An academic, Participant at a Qualitative Analysis Seminar, May 2004)*

*"I consider qualitative research as complementary to quantitative research. Particularly, it is good for understanding thoughts, feelings and attitudes of people and getting suggestions from people regarding an issue."  
An academic, Participant at a Qualitative Analysis Seminar, May 2004)*

Finally some encounters will be described.

Encounter 5: *“To support the quantitative data, I used data from interviews and observations” (Ph. D thesis, August 2003)*

As is idealism and realism, such is the difference between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. Is it possible to support and triangulate qualitative data from a few interviews with quantitative data obtained perhaps via questionnaires administered to about 400 subjects? Perhaps a few interviews may give added insight (however this is very limited) to the figures displayed in tables. For example if about 75% of the subjects say they strongly agree that their science teacher should use experiments to teach science concepts, this may mean several things such as (i) their teachers are not using experiments at all in their teaching, (ii) their teachers may be using other methods such as demonstration to teach science, or (iii) their teachers may already be using experiments to teach science. In order to gain insight interviews would be appropriate. However interviews conducted with a purposive sample of 10 science students may not be enough to gain insight for 400 randomly selected students. Some students have claimed that they have triangulated quantitative data with their qualitative data. Such is the understanding and so goes the ‘doing’ of qualitative research. In the real sense of doing qualitative research triangulation is trying to converge data gathered by different methods such as observations and interviews or data gathered by the same method but over time (Ely et al., 1998).

Encounter 6: *“Data has been triangulated between methods and within methods as well”.*(Ph. D thesis, August 2003)

Many a time although the researcher states the above in the report, the actual presentation of data does not reflect this triangulation. What is reported are mere narratives of events which are seldom grounded in the context of the study. The process of comparing and contrasting between data collected via different qualitative techniques about the same phenomenon is not classified and stated clearly. In a qualitative research report the data presented should be descriptive, thick and rich (Geertz, 1973). What is meant by richness or thickness– the report should include verbatim quotes, pictures and illustration as well as examples that could provide the reader with a concrete and holistic picture of what is studied. For example if you were to triangulate data on the processes of writing or reading in a classroom, data obtained from multiple sources, that is observations, interviews and document evidence will provide more concrete and reliable data. Researchers can also obtain validity and reliability by triangulating data obtained from a number of interviews, but these have to be reflected in the report. Once again can quantitative data be triangulated with qualitative data? A local anthropologist feels,

*“...how can one correlate quantitative and qualitative data?” “It not possible to correlate one person with the whole survey, it’s not possible at all.”*

*(Interview conducted in January, 2004)*

## **Paradigm 2: Summary**

The lack of academics who are immersed in the qualitative paradigm has given rise to many students who hold the idea that they must have both quantitative data and qualitative data in order for their study to be acceptable and to get through their examinations. Many conduct surveys and then do a few interviews and claim that their study is quantitative and qualitative with data that supports each other. This is because those with empirical quantitative data feel that their study is more valid and reliable. Many of these researchers also collect quantitative data and then try and support and 'triangulate' quantitative data with the qualitative data when they begin to analyse the data. Besides that the demand for quantitative data in certain fields have also given rise to a similar kind of qualitative research paradigm which must reflect both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Therefore many academics have found that they must obtain quantitative data in order and meet needs set by organizations. Their fear is that their work if purely qualitative will not be published in major journals. Once again this indicates that qualitative data is considered low in reliability and validity.

## **Conclusion**

Two main paradigms are emerging in Malaysia. First is the use of qualitative measures to collect qualitative data. Once this is done the researcher claims that qualitative research has been carried out. Second, students and academics alike have begun to conduct research using their own brand of mixed methods due to various



factors such as the need to publish, the need to pass their examinations and the lack of knowledgeable people in the field. Thus qualitative data collected is at times compared and contrasted with quantitative data as a triangulation process.

In the authors experiences, as can be seen from the above discussions, prolonged engagement which is imperative to gather an in-depth picture of the phenomenon being investigated is sadly lacking among researchers who say they have conducted qualitative research. The belief that the researcher is the 'instrument' in collecting data and that the researcher must become a part of the world being investigated is also lacking. In qualitative research the process of investigation cannot be separated from what is being investigated (Smith, 1983). It has been observed repeatedly by the authors of this paper that this understanding about the investigator and the investigated is not as yet as it should be and this is reflected in the conducting of qualitative research. Thus are the trends in Malaysian qualitative research.

*Acknowledgement:* Marohaini Yusoff, Zulkifli A. Manaf, Hawa Rohany, Rosmimah Mohd Roslin & Hafidz Omar, (2004) for data on the prevalence of QR.

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