
Navigating Paradigmatic Diversity in Social Science Research: Contemporary Perspectives on Philosophical Foundations

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Abstract: The philosophical fundamentals of social science inquiry have experienced substantial transformation as researchers get more involved with varied viewpoints on reality, knowledge, and values. However, the increasing range of research paradigms has made it difficult to identify their underlying assumptions and impact on research practice. This study addresses the major philosophical paradigms that underpin contemporary social science research, as well as their impact on knowledge creation and methodological choices. The paper takes an analytical and interpretive approach, relying on a desk-based review of pertinent literature and archival information. A critical examination of positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, social constructionism, interpretivism, pragmatism, and critical realism, with special emphasis on their ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological foundations. The findings indicate that research paradigms have a substantial impact on how reality is perceived, knowledge is developed and validated, and ethical issues are integrated into research. The review also shows a marked shift away from rigid, objective approaches towards a more flexible, context-sensitive, participatory and value-driven approach. Each paradigm provides different insights that shape the design of research, methodological choices and interpretation of findings. The paper also highlights the increasing importance of paradigm awareness in addressing complex social issues and promoting methodological pluralism in contemporary research. This paper concluded that careful alignment of research objectives with philosophical prerequisites is necessary to ensure methodological consistency, ethical integrity and meaningful research results. Increased awareness of these philosophical foundations can improve the quality, relevance and societal relevance of current research in the social sciences.

Keywords: Social science research, Philosophies, Research paradigms, Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology, Methodology.

1. Introduction

The philosophical foundations refer to the basic assumptions, beliefs and principles that guide the research process and the creation of knowledge. They provide an intellectual basis for understanding what constitutes reality, how knowledge can be acquired and what is valued in the research process. In social science, philosophical foundations are usually discussed in three interrelated dimensions: ontology, which deals with the nature of reality; epistemology, which deals with the nature and sources of knowledge; and axiology, which deals with the role of ethics and values in research (Blaikie, 2007; Crotty, 1998). The concept of the paradigm, which may be interpreted as a wide worldview or framework in which researchers see reality, generate research questions, and select the most appropriate investigative methods, is closely tied to these foundations. A set of presumptions and methods known as paradigms direct the entire research process and have an impact on the production and interpretation of information and knowledge.

Researchers' understanding of social phenomena and methodological choices are greatly influenced by the philosophical underpinnings of social science research. Positivism, a scientific paradigm that holds that there is an objective, non-subjective reality that can be investigated by empirical observation and logical reasoning, had a significant impact on early social science research (Cohen et al., 2007; Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). This viewpoint places a strong emphasis on hypothesis testing, causality, and the application of standardized and repeatable procedures. However, the usefulness of strictly positivist methods is being questioned more and more due to the complexity of social relationships and human behavior. According to Buriro et al. (2020) and Nashir Uddin and Hamidullah (2009), scholars contend that social reality is created by cultural, historical, emotional, and contextual aspects that are not always reflected by objective measures alone. Consequently, alternative paradigms that emphasize lived experience, subjective meaning, and the social construction of reality—such as constructivism, phenomenology, and interpretivism, have gained traction. Multiple paradigms are acknowledged as helpful for comprehending complicated social realities, and this growth parallels the broader trend towards philosophical pluralism in modern social scientific research (Creswell, 2013; Grbich, 2012).

Philosophical pluralism, which acknowledges that various paradigms offer unique but modern perspectives on complex social processes, is increasingly defining

contemporary social research. While cultural environments determine underlying assumptions and knowledge production, paradigms impact how researchers perceive reality, develop research questions, and interpret findings (Kuhn, 1962; Burr, 2020; Nashir Uddin & Hamidullah, 2009). Alternative lenses, including rationalist, interpretative, and critical methods, provide important insights into various aspects of the same phenomenon because no single paradigm can adequately explain complex social concerns (Fay, 1996; Crotty, 1998). Philosophical paradigms are widely used in social scientific research, but their assumptions, methodological ramifications, and practical applicability are still unclear. Scholarly inquiry has been enhanced by the increasing diversity of paradigmatic viewpoints, but it has also made it more difficult to choose suitable philosophical stances and to harmonize research topics, methodologies, and interpretations. As a result, a thorough analysis of the conceptual underpinnings of current social science research is required. Major research paradigms, such as positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, social constructionism, interpretivism, pragmatism, and critical realism, are critically examined in this study with an emphasis on their ontological, epistemological, and axiological presuppositions and their consequences for research design, methodology, ethics, and the creation of socially relevant knowledge.

2. Research Paradigm Shift: Epistemology, Ontology, Axiology and Methodology

A paradigm in social science research is a set of presumptions about reality, knowledge, values, and methods that directs investigation. It includes presumptions on axiology (the function of values), ontology (what exists), epistemology (how knowledge is understood), and methodology (how research is carried out). This methodological framework paradigm is shown in Figure 1. Increased conceptual diversity and methodological pluralism in modern social science research are results of this change.

The Research paradigm

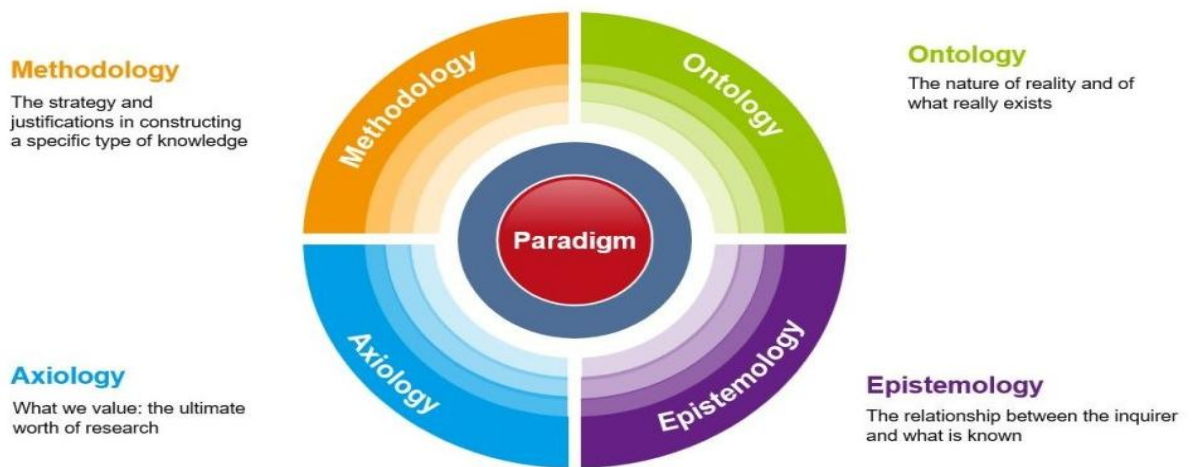


Figure 1. The Research Paradigm by Alele and Malau-Aduli (2023)

2.1 Epistemology: According to Audi (2010) epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and concerns how knowledge is acquired. Bryman and Bell (2001) argue, on the contrary, that epistemology is intended to provide a valid answer to the following types of questions: what is the relationship between the knower and the knower? What does evidence count for? From an epistemological point of view, it is then all about how one knows one knows something and what constitutes knowledge. It addresses questions about how knowledge is known, what constitutes evidence, and the relationship between the knower and what is known (Bryman & Bell, 2001). Social science research has historically used a positivist epistemology, which holds that knowledge is objective, quantifiable, and verifiable through facts and empirical observation (Bryman & Bell, 2001; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Moisiso, 2013). Therefore, the focus of epistemology is on the production of knowledge and what constitutes legitimate knowledge (Fiveable, 2024). However, modern viewpoints cast doubt on the idea that researchers are impartial observers, highlighting how human experience, interaction, and context socially build and influence knowledge (Blaikie, 2007; Burr et al., 2020). As a result, the perception of researchers as active contributors to knowledge generation is growing. This shift has stimulated epistemic pluralism, acknowledging that there may be more than one interpretation of reality and that perceptions of truth are frequently shaped by social, historical, and cultural circumstances rather than reflecting a single, universal reality.

2.2 Ontology: Ontology is the study of philosophical issues related to existence, such as the nature of reality and what exists (Vaid, n.d.). It inquires as to whether various socially produced realities exist or if there is only one objective reality. The study of existence and what exists is known as ontology. It's possible that in the past, people believed that reality was objective, outside of our perspective, and hence quantifiable through science (Ponterotto, 2005). However, views such as the interpretative and constructivist accept that social interactions have a profound effect on changing the nature of reality in order to fit the current context (Blaikie, 2007). As a result, reality is dynamic and ever-changing, influenced by how people understand and experience the world (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). Successive generations of scientists have investigated various perspectives and definitions of reality held by various social groupings. According to Nashir Uddin and Hamidullah (2009), this paradigm shift implies that other people's experiences might also appear very different, which directly affects how we research and recognize the social situation.

2.3 Axiology: Axiology is concerned with research values, which include ethical issues and the researcher's ethical position (Alejo and Malau-Aduli, 2023). Axiology uses these concepts to describe research values, ethics, and what is good or important. Historically, research was viewed as value-neutral, with researchers expected to be impartial and objective. But now, with the rise of interpretivism, it is understood that any study, no matter how impartial, is influenced by the researcher's values (Buriro et al., 2020). Alejandro and Malau-Aduli (2023) state that axiology raises questions such as "What are the parameters that direct investigation?" How are the participants being treated? Research today is shaped by values including respect, equity, and cultural sensitivity (Bryman & Bell, 2001). Therefore, when studying or researching marginalized or vulnerable groups, researchers should consider how their values influence their work. Axiology is currently a key component of ethical and socially relevant social science, as the paradigm shift in axiology has demonstrated the value of all knowledge and the ongoing ethical reflection required for responsible research (Nashir Uddin and Hamiduzzaman, 2009).

2.4 Methodology: Methodology is the practical extension of philosophical foundations that has changed dramatically as a result of the major paradigm shift in social scientific research. Methodology is the overarching approach that connects a researcher's philosophical beliefs to the following selection of data collection techniques. It was formerly believed that to find objective facts, methodology focused

on quantitative techniques, surveys, experiments, etc. (Cohen et al., 2007). Qualitative techniques for understanding people's experiences and meanings, including interviews, case studies, and observations, have gained comparable importance in more recent paradigms (Buriro et al., 2020; Creswell, 2013). In an effort to explain social challenges in the most systematic way possible, a growing body of research uses mixed methodologies, which combine qualitative and quantitative techniques (Morgan, 2007). Today, methodology should be adaptable and consistent with one's own metaphysical perspective on reality and knowledge. Researchers are encouraged to choose the best option for their specific study thanks to this new recognition, which also makes research flexible and applicable to real-world situations.

3. Research Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative research methodology that synthesizes existing literature in the field of philosophical foundations. Based on reviews, this paper examines the philosophical basis of social science research in relation to the progressive change of paradigms. The study systematically reviews existing literature to provide a broad overview of research paradigms such as positivism, post positivism, constructivism, social constructionism, interpretivism, pragmatism and critical realism in order to provide guidance for methodological social science thinking. Literature has been screened against well-established sources such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Scopus, peer-reviewed journals and books, as well as some basic research philosophy textbooks. The review categorized the results of the search in thematic terms under the main headings of the philosophical dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. The focus was on the question of the interpretation and phenomenological areas of phenomena that are becoming more human and contextual. This analytical process reveals general trends, theoretical insights and practical implications for new and old social research scholars alike.

4. Results and Discussion

The research onion concept provides a layer of methodological design for research (Saunders et al., 2019; Seuring et al., 2021) as illustrated in Figure 2. The model starts with general philosophical considerations (e.g. positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism), moves through approaches to theorizing (deductive, inductive, abductive), methodological choices (mono- or quadratic, mixed methods), research

strategies (experiment, case study, ethnographic), time dimension (intersectional, longitudinal), and ends with specific data collection and analysis techniques. The hierarchical arrangement goes to show that all the elements are interrelated in giving a coherent and diligent research design.

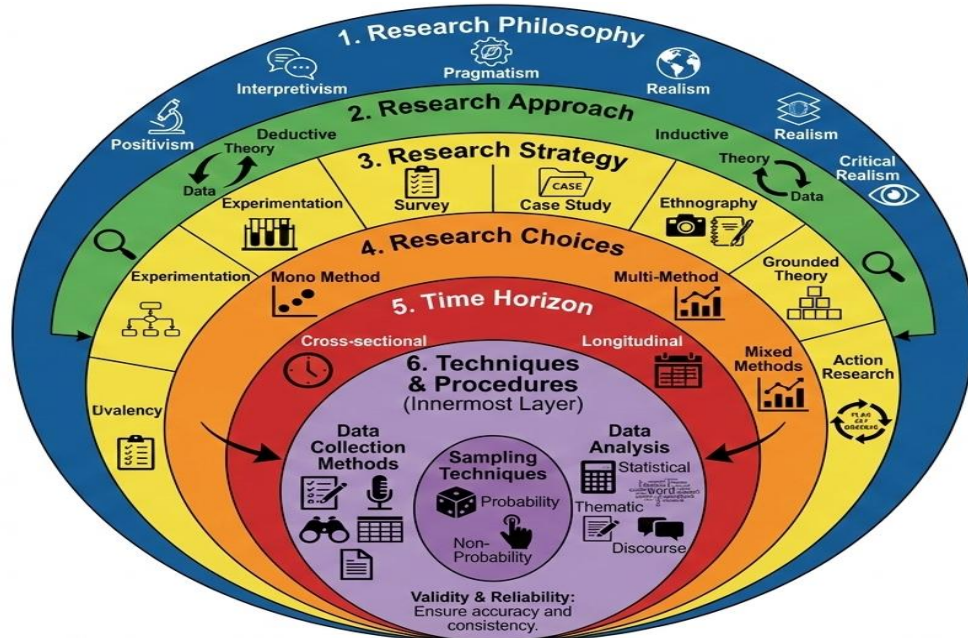


Figure 2. Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2019).

Research Philosophies (Theoretical Perspective): In the Field of Social Science

In social science, research philosophies offer comprehensive overviews that specify methods for comprehending, analyzing, and exploring knowledge. These philosophies are a reflection of the research design, the methodologies chosen, and the interpretation of the findings. In order to better understand human behavior and society, this section examines some of the most significant research philosophies.

4.1 Positivism: Positivism emphasizes empirical observation, measurement, and scientific procedures for understanding social phenomena, and it maintains that social reality is objective and independent of the researcher. Generalizability, predictability, and causal explanation of observable variables are given priority (Heywood, 2015; Hamiduzzaman & Uddin, 2009). Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and René Descartes (1596–1650), who emphasized reason and sensory experience as the foundations of knowledge, are frequently credited with its philosophical origins (Hugh, 1987; Kuhn, 2022). Positivist thinking in sociology is linked to viewing social truths as objective reality that may be investigated using scientific techniques. This method usually uses quantitative designs to find patterns in big datasets and test theories. Scholars like Weber (1922–1978), who contended that social reality is

likewise impacted by subjective meanings and must be understood through interpretive approaches that take actors' viewpoints into account, have contested it. Furthermore, detractors contend that positivism may ignore people's complexity, context, and lived experiences in social contexts (Karupiah, 2022).

4.2 Post-Positivism: Post-positivism maintains the tenets of positivism, but it also accepts its limits. In its view, every observation is tainted by a theory that implies that objectivity cannot be complete (Fox & Ramazanoglu, 2008; Heywood, 2015). This approach emphasizes empirical research, while taking into account any possible bias of the researcher and the extremely complex nature of social phenomena. The main focus of post-positivists is the nature of the assurance of results; therefore, concepts such as reliability and validity coexist with methodological pluralism. They use both inductive and deductive reasoning and accept that qualitative work may be seen as supporting and complementing quantitative work. Most importantly, it considers that knowledge is provisional and can be falsified. Post-positivism is still a post-embracing discipline; it encourages a conscious and critical appraisal of its premises, thus providing a balanced approach to understanding and interpreting social reality.

4.3 Interpretivism: The goal of interpretation is to understand the significance that individuals give to their experiences and social behaviors. According to Chowdhury (2014) and Nickerson (2024), they believe that reality is socially produced and that qualitative techniques like fieldwork, participant observation, and interviews are the best ways to understand it. Interpretationists argue that knowledge is subjective and influenced by context and culture. Instead of searching for universal rules, researchers explore participants' daily experiences to create meaning with them. Clifford Geertz (1973) refers to this method as an interpretation science, highlighting the ability of a story to comprehend action as well as the levels of meaning it contains. This viewpoint highlights how crucial context is to understanding social symbols and human behavior. As a result, interpretation prioritizes rich, in-depth narratives above numerical depictions, which are intended to convey the breadth of the lived experience. Its emphasis on subjectivity, according to critics, may decrease replicability and raise the possibility of researcher bias. Nonetheless, interpretivism still has a significant impact on sociology and public administration, fields where comprehending meaning, culture, and lived reality is essential to the research.

4.4 Constructivism: According to constructivism, knowledge is co-created by people and is ultimately shaped by cultural, historical, and social circumstances. This focuses on how people generate meaning by making sense of their experiences through subjective negotiations of reality (Hurd, 2009; Allen, 2022; Shannon-Baker, 2023). When it comes to methodological techniques, constructivism is a good fit for qualitative research; methods that support the participant's perspective include ethnography, narrative, and other approaches. A constructivist researcher thus considers himself an actor in the creation of knowledge instead of a distanced observer. It rejects the notion of universal truths and supports multiple sets of considerations that are borne in the context of uniqueness. Some critics suggest that such relativism impairs any objective conclusion; yet, constructivism shines in the exploration of identity, belief systems, and convoluted human actions-very much so in education and cultural studies.

4.5 Empiricism: Empiricism holds that knowledge is primarily derived from sensory experience and that hypotheses and theories must be tested through observation and experimentation (Hjørland, 2005; Hossain, 2014; Sber, 2013). Experience and induction are the cornerstones of knowledge and scientific thinking, according to classical empiricists like John Locke, David Hume, and John Stuart Mill. It continues to be essential to scientific research by emphasizing methodical observation and experimentation as the foundation for reliable information (Meyers, 2014). Empiricism prioritizes sensory experience as the most trustworthy source of knowledge, while ontologically it believes in an organized reality composed of visible phenomena guided by regular patterns. However, rigorous empiricism is contested by critical rationalists like Popper (1959), who contend that scientific assertions must be falsified rather than confirmed by observation alone. Empiricism's claim of neutrality is further criticized by feminist epistemologists like Harding (1991) and Haraway (1988), who emphasize that knowledge production is socially located and influenced by power relations. Empiricism nonetheless supports quantitative research and evidence-based methods in spite of these criticisms, especially in studies that emphasize measurement, objectivity, and observable outcomes.

4.6 Idealism: Idealism is the belief that ideas are ultimately the only real existence, particularly in its metaphysical ramifications (Brightman, 1933; Sharlow, 2022). It is predicated on the idea that social reality emerges as a result of people's interpretation and negotiation of meanings. The ontological idealism asserts that reality is

pre-interpreted, by subjective experience. Epistemological perspective holds the idea that knowledge comes from every day meaning rather than objective observation. Researcher goes in the social world to unravel these meanings and make them into theoretical knowledge. Idealism considers that meaning is not external but internal in terms of acts of interpretation. Unfortunately, it has been criticized for not keeping into consideration the effect of institutional structures and power equations on this interpretation. It also cannot constitute a sufficiently good explanation of how meanings are shaped by wider societal forces and sometimes can be too simplistic in the representation of social reality.

4.7 Rationalism: According to the Haserot (1947) and Sangeetha (2021), rationalism believes that the ultimate source of knowledge is reason or purpose and not sensory experience. Thus, it is also argued that knowledge is best achieved by mathematical or logical modeling. Rationalists believe that a rational structure exists separately from sensory experience and can be realized through systematic reasoning. Ontologically, it and empiricism or positivism have some common ground, in assuming a structured reality, yet it is not willing to allow that sensory experience is a basis for knowledge, thus effectively obscuring the distinction between observational and theoretical statements, treating all observations as laden with theory. It thus forms a valid philosophical base for ideologies like liberalism and socialism, resting on reasoned understanding with respect to society. But rationalism could be said to lack any emotional context in the experiential knowledge utilized for understanding human action.

4.8 Functionalism: Functionalism is a sociological approach, rooted in a realist ontology, where society is seen as an objective, integrated machine made of interrelated bits that work together to keep social order and stability. Philosophically, you can trace it back to the thinking of Auguste Comte and Émile Durkheim (1895/1982) and then later Talcott Parsons (1951) too, who insisted there are social structures and institutions that kind of run on their own, not really depending on individual people. On the knowledge side, functionalism feels much tied to positivism, so it likes objective looking, and it goes hunting for consistent regularities and causal links in social life. As for how it's studied, functionalism mostly leans on quantitative and comparative strategies to ask how institutions like family, education, religion, and law help with social bonding and the steady continuation of society. Overall, according to functionalists, who perceive society as an integrated, self-regulating

whole, social events typically continue because they serve vital purposes for the larger social system (Main, 2023). However, detractors claim that functionalism may inadvertently excuse current arrangements and that it sort of leans toward social order at the expense of conflict, inequality, and those power imbalances (Lozano-Gotor, 2013; Majeed, 2024; Van Gulick, 2009). According to Ryan (2005), structural functionalism, on the other hand, sees society as a system of interconnected pieces that cooperate to preserve stability. It is based on Durkheim and Parsons and stresses quantitative approaches and empirical analysis (Castro, 2009; Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 2008), but detractors claim it ignores social change and conflict.

4.9 Structuralism: A theoretical perspective known as structuralism aims to explain social and cultural phenomena by identifying the underlying or hidden structures that influence how individuals think, communicate, and interact with one another. Saussure's (1916/1983) theories about language had an influence on it, and Lévi-Strauss (1963) somewhat advanced them (see Ferreirós, 2023). The basic claim, at least in broad strokes, is that meaning doesn't just pop out of what someone does, but instead it shows up through relationships among the elements inside a given system. In philosophical terms, it sits on a realist ontology, meaning it treats structures as something objective that exists on their own, even if individuals are not aware of them. Then, epistemologically, it focuses on digging out repeatable patterns and connections that manage or organize social life (Runciman, 1969; Kronenfeld & Decker, 1979). In terms of methodology, structuralism typically relies on analytical and comparative techniques to reveal the intricate structures that underlie what we can actually observe in routine social interactions. However, detractors claim that it occasionally downplays agency and might not give historical change adequate consideration (Arndt, 1985).

4.10 Critical Theory: Critical theory aims to question power structures, injustices, and prevailing ideas in order to both understand and change society (Moisio, 2013). Marxist, feminist, and post-colonialist emancipatory and justice viewpoints help to understand the idea. Critical theorists like Callaghan (2017), Alvesson & Deetz (1999), and Garlitz & Zompetti (2021) contend that knowledge is created by a web of power relations at a certain historical moment and is not always neutral and objective. This viewpoint's research frequently draws attention to oppression and disenfranchisement while giving the weak a voice. To uncover the underlying power dynamics in society, theoretical and qualitative analyses are employed. Critics argue

that critical theory rarely prioritizes empirical sufficiency over ideology (DePoy & Gitlin, 2015). Its focus on change and reflexivity, however, has solidified its position in the nexus of public administration, politics, sociology, and education.

4.11 Pragmatism: The approach to pragmatism does not particularly care for methodical approaches but insists most on considering outcomes rather than depending on a given methodology approach (Sanches de Oliveira, 2022). It separates positivist and interpretivist paradigms through an integrative combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Pragmatist researchers use a method based on the research problem not its philosophical fitting and the quest is for solutions for action (Kelly, & Cordeiro, 2020). The truth is provisional here and context dependent and knowledge is judged on its usefulness. This encourages innovation, flexibility, and outreach. The main contention is that while it offers flexibility, critics would hold that it does not have philosophical depth or consistency. Nevertheless, it enjoys great application in mixed-method studies and indeed into many applied fields such as policy analysis, education, and public health.

4.12 Realism: Realism believes that existence is independent from human perception, while at the same time accepting the reality that it still exists within socially, historically and scientifically framed perceptions (Rice, 2021). Such phenomena belong to that type of realist ontology which may be visible as well as invisible phenomena under some particular circumstances. The subject of reality includes layered realities with causalities, linking empirical data-oriented positivism to interpretivist concern with social context (Marsonet, 2020). Realism compromises theoretical explanation with causal mechanisms and complex social processes represented with models. It is also a very important theme in critical realism, which attempts to scope out the structures and mechanisms of social outcomes. Critics have reason to believe that realism is over abstract or speculative. Realism caters to solid bases on issues of layered and complex social realities- particularly seen in cases like sociology and political science (Hibberd & Petocz, 2022).

4.13 Phenomenology: It looks at human experience from a first-person viewpoint, emphasizing how people understand and interpret the world in which they live (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). As a philosophical approach, it aims to methodically explore the nature of subjective experience. Edmund Husserl (1913/1931) established this tradition by emphasizing consciousness, intentionality, and the essence of phenomena through epoché, or bracketing of assumptions. Martin Heidegger (1927/1962)

expanded this perspective by emphasizing being-in-the-world and stressing that meaning is shaped by lived existence and context (Williams, 2021). According to Qutoshi (2018), phenomenology seeks to convey genuine meaning by describing experiences as they are lived, suspending the researcher's preconceptions. To investigate lived experience, it frequently employs qualitative techniques, including in-depth interviews and introspection. Transcendental and existential phenomenology are examples of variations that focus on various aspects of meaning. Despite providing a profound understanding of subjectivity, it is frequently critiqued for having poor replicability and generalizability (Williams, 2021). However, psychology, education, and public administration continue to use it extensively.

4.14 Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics is the philosophy of interpretation, initially concerned with texts but now widely applied in the interpretation of social actions and cultural symbols (Barrett et al., 2011). It emphasizes contexts, historical background, and also the role of interpreter in giving the meaning. Hermeneutic research is an iterative interpretation above parts and wholes in order to work towards deeper understanding, a process called as hermeneutic circle (Zimmermann, 2015). It marks one of the significant approaches in qualitative research and especially theology, law, literature, and sociology. Hermeneutics shows that all understanding depends on previous experience and cultural background (Matthews et al., 1979). Critics complain about subjectivity and loose structure. Nevertheless, it continues to be the foundational bedrock theory for how meaning can be discovered in human communication and interaction.

4.15 Feminist Theory: Feminist theory is a theoretical perspective that highlights how gender shapes social life and critically investigates patriarchal power and inequality structures (Sandford, 2015). It draws attention to how women's voices are underrepresented in conventional research and advocates for alternative epistemologies based on emotion, lived experience, and reflexivity. According to feminist academics, knowledge is power-laden and socially placed, with social location affecting the creation and interpretation of knowledge (Witt, 1996). By combining gender analysis with more general anthropological concerns of identity, difference, and social transformation, Henrietta Moore's feminist anthropology (1994) greatly advances the field in this regard. Moore argues that gender is not a fixed category but is continuously constructed through cultural and historical processes (see Nye, 2013). In order to reveal oppressive systems and advance social change, feminist

initiatives frequently rely on interpretivism and critical theory. Feminist theory's contributions to social justice, inclusivity, and reflexivity are still widely acknowledged in sociology, education, and cultural studies, despite detractors' claims that it could bring bias or threaten essentialism (Nye, 2013).

4.16 Postmodernism: Postmodernism questions the objectivity of science, emphasizes heterogeneity, fragmentation, and ambiguity in knowledge production, and questions universal truths and grand narratives (Hassard, 1999). It contends that language, culture, and power dynamics shape knowledge, making reality contingent and context-dependent (Patton, 2001). While Jacques Derrida (1978) further develops postmodern critique through deconstruction, exposing the instability of meaning within texts and challenging fixed interpretations or binary oppositions, Michel Foucault (1972; 1977), a key figure in postmodern thought, shows how knowledge and truth are historically produced through discursive formations and power relations, demonstrating that what is accepted as "truth" is closely tied to institutional power (Wight, 2018). Thus, postmodernism prioritizes local, contextual, and "mini-narratives" above universal explanations and stresses the critique of prevailing ideologies (Wight, 2018). Critics contend that this viewpoint undermines cohesive theory-building and runs the risk of relativism (Hassard, 1999). However, because of its robust critique of power and its extension of interpretative inquiry, it continues to have an impact on cultural studies, gender theory, and postcolonial research.

4.17 Post-Structuralism: It emphasizes the fluidity of meaning, the fluidity of language, and the formation of knowledge and identity through discourse, building upon structuralism but challenging its presumptions of fixed structures and stable meanings (Jacobs, 2018). The ideas of post-structuralism were influenced by thinkers such as Roland Barthes in 1967, Jacques Derrida in 1966, Michel Foucault in 1960, Gilles Deleuze in 1967, and Jean Baudrillard in 1966. These thinkers became interested in analyzing how power operates through institutions, language, and knowledge systems (Schrift, 2018). Usually, deconstruction is employed to expose contradictions and implicit presumptions in texts and actions. Particularly in literary theory, critical discourse analysis, and cultural studies, post-structuralism provides important insights into how meaning and identity are produced, despite criticism that it is imprecise and cannot accept empirical validation (May, 2012).

4.18 Symbolic Interactionism: According to Chamberlain-Salaun et al. (2013), symbolic interactionist perspectives on the social world offer a broader

reinterpretation of how people create and comprehend meaning through social interaction. It looks at how words, gestures, and symbols are used to create individual and collective identities (Carter & Fuller, 2015). It is institutionally micro, making negotiation about reality although phenomena produced in and among people. A participant observation and qualitative interview would allow typical symbolic interactionist research to engage in a process for discovering how meanings are made in their everyday practice (Del Casino & Thien, 2019). Many lights about interpersonal behavior and self-concept are illuminated by it. However, critiques maintain that it may miss some levels in broader social structure (Burbank & Martins, 2009). Yet another important dimension of sociology, if not degraded, is social psychology.

4.19 Ethnomethodology: Ethnomethodology looks at the everyday ways in which people make sense of their social world ((Bauman, 1973; Heywood, 2015, p. 104). Regular routines, social practices, and standards of behavior all guide such a way of living and are typically studied through close conversation analysis and fieldwork (Clayman, 2001). Ethno-methodologists research how order is constructed and maintained through often quite mundane social interactions (Arminen, 2008). This perspective interprets social reality as an ongoing achievement-that which is recreated every time by means of communication (Lynch, 2002). Admiration has followed it for its attention to detail and context, while some criticisms have been directed at it as been too micro level and lacking more general theoretical frameworks. But ethnomethodology still offers one of the best lenses through which to understand what comprises the taken for granted aspects of social life (Dennis, 2003).

Major Research Paradigms of Social Science Philosophies

The major philosophies evident in the paradigms refer specifically to the ontology (the nature of reality), the epistemologies (how knowledge is understood), and the axiologies (the position of values in research). Each of the following paradigms is put on treatises in constructive comparison: positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, social constructionism, interpretivism, pragmatism, and critical realism. The important point is emphasized that researchers may identify from it the paradigm with which they feel the greatest affinity regarding their philosophical stance, thus facilitating the maintenance of coherence and integrity within their research design.

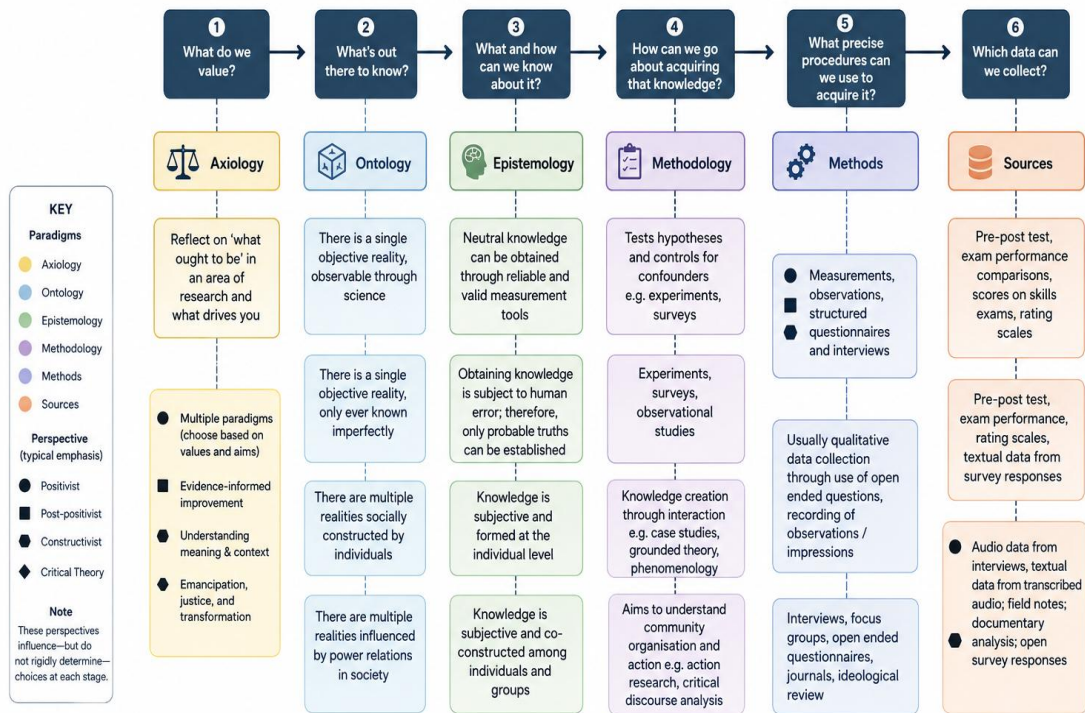


Figure 3. Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology, and Methodology of Research Paradigms

Figure 3 outlines a framework for selecting a research paradigm through six interconnected dimensions: axiology, ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods, and sources. It begins with axiology, focusing on the values of the researcher, comes first, followed by ontology (beliefs about reality) and epistemology (the process of acquiring and comprehending information). These philosophical stances influence methodology, direct the selection of research techniques for gathering and analyzing data, and identify relevant data sources. While constructivism and critical theory emphasize socially constructed realities and favor qualitative methods like focus groups, interviews, observations, and document analysis, positivism and post-positivism typically assume an objective, measurable reality and rely on quantitative methods like surveys and experiments (Brown & Dueñas, 2020). The framework encompasses seven paradigms that differ primarily in ontological, epistemological, and axiological presumptions: positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, social constructionism, interpretivism, pragmatism, and critical realism (Karupiah, 2022). Constructivist and interpretivist viewpoints stress context-dependent meanings, whereas positivists presuppose a single objective reality. Critical realism recognizes an external reality while looking for underlying causal mechanisms, while pragmatism emphasizes practical results. In general, these

philosophical stances influence methodological choices and guarantee consistency between the nature of inquiry and research design (Pretorius, 2024; Karupiah, 2022).

5. Conclusion

Finally, the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological philosophical foundations of social science research are critical components for social scientists to understand and interpret their social environment. This study outlines seven research paradigms, each of which represents an epistemological and axiological perspective on the world. With fresh ideas and changing societies, researchers should begin to disregard paradigms that are appropriate for their subject and beliefs. In contrast, interpretivism and phenomenology rely on subjective sense-making, lived experience, and the socially constructed aspect of reality, therefore they use qualitative methods of knowing to investigate how people interpret their own environment. In the meantime, structuralism and structural functionalism provide macro-level explanations of society by highlighting the institutional interconnections, underlying systems, and patterns that support social order and stability. By exposing power dynamics, gender inequality, and the fact that "truth" or meaning can be fragile rather than fixed, feminist and postmodern viewpoints also challenge prevailing modes of knowing. This broadens the scope of research to include voices that are frequently ignored in addition to other narratives.

Taken together, these paradigms demonstrate how social science research is heterogeneous and always changing, necessitating the use of more than one theoretical lens to capture the rich complexity of social reality. Nowadays, contemporary work increasingly demonstrates methodological pluralism, which means that qualitative and quantitative methodologies are used for a more complete, or at least balanced, understanding. Overall, the study reveals that being aware of philosophical paradigms is vital for maintaining theoretical coherence, improving methodological discipline and ethical integrity, and remaining constructive, critical, and reflexive in contemporary social science research.

Acknowledgement

This study has not received any financial support. The contents are the author's responsibility and do not necessarily reflect the views of the author's organizations.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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