

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Who is afraid of Qualitative Research? A Compromise Accounting Research Failure in Improving accounting Practices

Theresia Woro Damayant*

Faculty of Economic and Business Satya Wacana Christian University.

*Corresponding Author:Email:woro@staff.uksw.edu

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to find a compromise over the failure of accounting research in improving accounting practices. Various debate occurred between the pros and cons between quantitative and qualitative research. Both depend on philosophical commitments of researchers. The failure of accounting research to improve accounting practices can be resolved through scientific qualitative research is scientific, the qualitative research that meet the elements of validity and reliability.

Keywords: *Accounting Research Failures, Qualitative Reseach.*

Introduction

The accounting research, just like social research, is the process of finding knowledge that will hopefully be useful in developing new theories and resolve issues related to economic issues, management and accounting. Consequently, a study cannot be made without regard to the rules of science. A research should be conducted based on the principles of logical thinking and done repeatedly since the research did not stop at a particular point in time [1]. The essence of a research is its findings, with no significant findings, a study would not have a significant contribution to science.

Some criticisms toward accounting research is that accounting research has little value to the development of the practice of accounting or accounting as an academic discipline [2]. Accounting research should aim to improve accounting practices, as well as medical research that always aims to improve the practice of medicine. The current breakthroughs in medicine are impossible without prior research. In medicine going strong links between research, education and practice of medicine. Opposites occur in accounting. In the accounting world, there is such a wide gap between the study of accounting, accounting education and accounting practice [3-5].

The linkage between research accounting, accounting education and accounting practice that

described by Sterling [6] is reflected in Fig. 1. Figure 1 illustrates that the content of accounting education should be the result of accounting research, therefore, when the student finishes college and enters the practical world, he/she can implement these accounting research in the world of practice.

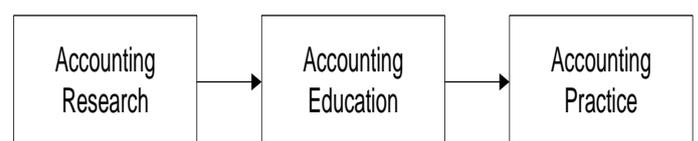


Fig. 1. The linkage between research accounting, accounting education and accounting practice
Source: Sterling (1973)

The gap between the study of accounting, accounting education and accounting practices occur because of differences in interests between actors in accounting. The main focus of accounting research is not on how to address the problems found in the practice of accounting but lies in academic career and reputation, one of which lies in the achievement of the publication. This often led to more interest in accounting researchers to study topics that are the focus of a leading journal rather than to what is becoming a problem in accounting practices. Status of accounting researchers determined more than on the quality of the journal where the research results published than on the quality of the problem or its findings [7].

Ironically journals categorized as high quality journal by the accounting researchers only a slight of them accept articles that use field research [7]. Field research is another naming of qualitative research. Qualitative research carried out using a variety of approaches, so the researchers used the term field research as an umbrella of the various approaches used in qualitative research [8]. The small number of journals that receive qualitative research articles allegedly because qualitative research is considered as being less scientific than quantitative research. Therefore, as a result, there is only a little interest in the study were based on qualitative research [9].

On the other hand, qualitative research is actually real close between accounting research and accounting practice for the main purpose of qualitative research is to get closer to the existing reality [10]. Qualitative research gives insight into the actual details of an accounting practice that is not found in the literature [11]. Therefore, many qualitative studies would eliminate failures of accounting research in improving existing practices.

From observing a contradiction between the importance of qualitative research in the eliminating of failure in accounting research to improve accounting practices and the minuscule amount of journal articles that use qualitative approach, this study will further examine the contradictions between qualitative research and quantitative research to unravel the differences between both of them based on the philosophical aspects. Furthermore, this research will narrow the gap between qualitative and quantitative research by emphasizing that both of them should be done by considering scholarship of a research

Quantitative Versus Qualitative Research from the view of Philosophical Research

Quantitative research was developed to support and justify different accounting methods or practices in the real world. Then the results of empirical research is a statement or proposition that will be a positive accounting theory [12]. Quantitative research is seen to have many weaknesses, among of them is that quantitative research does not provide a means to improve accounting practices. And even, Deegan [13] gave an opinion that the quantitative accounting research has been separated from accounting practices.

Another disadvantage of quantitative research is that it is not a value-free research. This was confirmed by quantitative researchers that they did not want to impose their views on others but rather to provide information about the expected implications of certain actions and allow people to decide for themselves what they should do. The weaknesses of this quantitative studies then generates a qualitative study that offers a way to overcome the weaknesses of quantitative researches.

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research gives insight into the details of an accounting practice that is not found in the literature [11]. Parker [14] states that qualitative research gives more emphasis on understanding and critique of the process and provide insight into something unique and different. The main objective of qualitative research is to get closer to the existing reality [10]. Qualitative research is research conducted in specific settings that exist in real life (natural) in order to investigate and understand the phenomena: what happened, why it happened and how it happened. So, qualitative research is based on the concept of going exploring involving in-depth and case-oriented study on a number of cases or a single case [15].

There are several reasons cited by Chariri [16] why qualitative research needs to be done. First, the field of study is not the discipline that "value free". That is, business activities and management is highly dependent on the values, norms, cultures, and certain behaviors happens in a business environment. If the environment is different, the style and approach may be different. This is due to management/business is a reality that formed socially through interaction of the individual and the environment (socially constructed reality), is a practice created by man (human creation), is a symbolic discourse formed by individuals (symbolic discourse) and the result of human creativity (human creativity). As for the second reason is that not all values, behaviors, and interactions between social actors with the environment can be quantified. This is due to a person's perception of something depends on the values, cultures, experiences and others that brought by the individual.

However Chariri [16] also identified that qualitative research has disadvantages such as researchers can not be 100% independent and neutral from the research setting and qualitative research is highly unstructured (messy) and highly interpretive. Many researchers have also

questioned the bias and accuracy of qualitative research because Ahrens & Dent [17] gives the condition that scientific research must be thorough and unbiased.

Despite the debates between the advantages and disadvantages comparing quantitative and qualitative research, Richardson [11] on the contrary states that both of them do not need to be contrasted. The selection of whether to use quantitative or qualitative research studies rely on philosophical commitments of researchers [18]. Richardson [11] clearly illustrates the philosophical basis in the selection of quantitative and qualitative (Fig. 2).

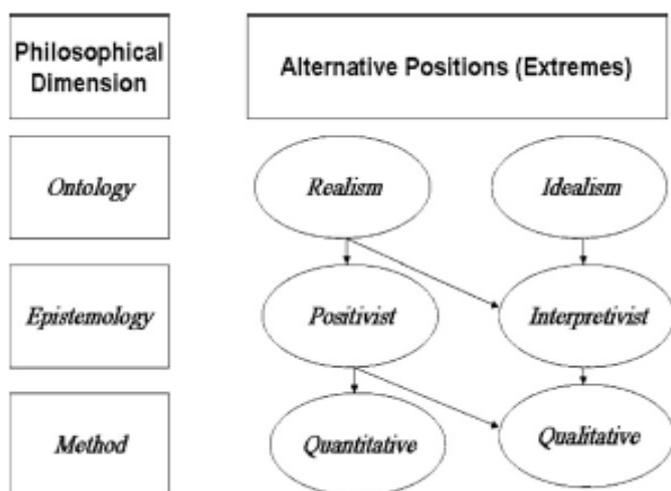


Fig. 2. Philosophical basis in quantitative and qualitative

Source: Richardson [11]

From the point of view of ontologies, the basic question of ontology emphasizes the reality that investigated whether reality is objective or individual cognitive product. The debate about the ontology distinguish between realism and idealism. Realism assumes that the social world exists independently of individual appreciation while idealism assumes that the social world that are beyond the individual's cognitive derived from mere names, concepts and labels that are used to construct reality. uantitative research (Fig. 2).

From the point of view of ontologies, the basic question of ontology emphasizes the reality that investigated whether reality is objective or as individual cognitive product. The debate about the ontology distinguish between *realism* and *idealism*. *Realism* assumes that the social world exists independently of individual appreciation while *idealism* assumes that the social world that are existed beyond the individual's cognitive and derived from mere names, concepts and labels that are used to construct reality.

Epistemology is the assumption about the grounds of knowledge, that is about how people start to understand the world and communicate that as a knowledge to others. The debate about epistemology, therefore, distinguished between positivism and antipositivisme. Positivism seeks to explain and predict what will happen in the social world by searching habits and the causal relationship between the principal elements while antipositivisme defy the laws or customs searches staple in the world of social affairs who argue that the social world can only be understood from the perspective of individuals who are directly involved in the activities under investigation. The methodology is assumptions about how someone tried to investigate and gain knowledge about the social world can be divided into qualitative and quantitative.

Based on the philosophical exposition above, the use of quantitative research and qualitative research is not an option about which one is better or which one is worse. Chooses are based on a philosophical commitment from researchers and based what he would be the purpose of a study. However, one thing is for sure and it should be remembered is that the findings of a study should be as accountable scholarship. Therefore, to maintain the scholarship of a study, both quantitative and qualitative research studies, they should be done carefully and no bias [19].

Assessing the Scholarship of a Research

The essence of a study is how the findings of the study contribute to the development of science. Ijiri [20] identified at least three things that must be considered in a study that will contribute to the development of science. The first is the renewal of a study. Second, the findings of a study must be sustained through a logical thought and can be verified by other researchers and the last is a result of research should be able to be disseminated.

To achieve those three things then both quantitative and qualitative research studies should be conducted based on the principles of logical thinking and is based on scientific principles [1]. Ahrens and Dent [17] stated that the study should contain two elements of *art* and *science*. The study contains *art* in the sense that a study should build interest and investigate real cases in the organization and linking them with accounting theory. But it can be a dangerous thing if a study contains only contain art without science. Therefore, an investigation must be

thorough and unbiased in order to meet the criteria of science.

A research meets the criteria as a science if a study be conducted with rigorous and unbiased. Careful research and unbiased research should consider aspects of validity (which consists of construct validity, internal validity and external validity) and reliability. In quantitative research, validity and reliability is not something that is still questionable because quantitative research really concerned with validity and reliability. However, in qualitative research, validity and reliability issues often still invites a big question. Therefore, this research will only discuss the validity and reliability in qualitative research.

Validity is a measure that indicates the level of validity or the legality of an instrument [21]. The principle of validity is a measurement or observation, which means reliability principle of an instrument in collecting data. Instruments must be able to measure what actually be measured. Therefore, validity gives more emphasis on the measurement instrument or on observation. Validity is divided into three, namely construct validity, internal validity and external validity.

Definition by Abernethy & Chua [22] construct validity is the extent to which the theory is built successfully operationalized in the research. In quantitative research, the construct validity is manifested through a clear definition, a clear operationalization and clear measurement. Meanwhile, in a qualitative study some researchers argue that it is the advantage of construct validity of qualitative research because qualitative research can capture a complicated and complex data without simplification process [23]. However, in qualitative research still requires the construct validity through a clear definition of the constructs and clear rules about how and when a construct should be examined.

The second in the validity is internal validity. Internal validity is the degree of accuracy among design of research and the results achieved. In quantitative research, internal validity can be achieved through proper multivariate techniques, variable control, and robustness tests. While in qualitative research, internal validity is identical to the terms of credibility, which means the study had a high level of confidence as it is in the field. Creswell and Miller [24] offers nine procedures to enhance the credibility of qualitative research: triangulation, disconfirming evidence, research

reflexivity, member checking, prolonged engagement in the field, collaboration, the audit trail, thick and rich description and peer debriefing. Triangulation means using a variety of approaches in doing research. In qualitative research, researchers can use a variety of data sources, theories, methods and investigators that the information presented consistent. Therefore, to understand and find answers to the research questions, researchers can use more than one theory, more than one method (interview, observation and document analysis). In addition, researchers in conducting interviews from subordinates to superiors and to interpret the findings with others. Disconfirming evidence done by finding the consistent themes and categories and apply specific processes in refutation (disconfirm) findings. Steps taken is identifying research themes, and if it is identified, look for negative evidence.

In reflexivity research, researchers explain aspects of ontology, epistemology, and human type assumptions used in the study. How this is done to show the reader why a particular theory and specific research methods adopted. This aspect needs to be unfold, because the perception of researchers formed by the system of values and beliefs. While member checking is done by returning to the research setting to verify the credibility of the information. The steps in the procedure is that any findings should be discussed and checked for validity by people in the organization who knows the phenomenon under study whether the data / findings are equally true and interpreted both by researchers and others. Another thing that needs to be done to improve the credibility is by Prolonged Engagement In The Field which researchers can allocate considerable time in research settings (usually more than 3 months, depending on the purpose of the study). This step can reduce the possibility of observer-caused effect (a condition that occurs in the field due to the presence of the observer), observer bias (misinterpretation due to lack of data and knowledge) and the difficulty in gaining access to the data needed

Another way that can be done to improve the credibility is by collaboration. On the basis of this procedure, researchers can designate a participant to be appointed as a co-researcher in the research process. Participant plays his role as "spy" in charge of helping to find the data, and interpret the findings. To be credible, the participant must have knowledge of the phenomenon under study and have access to the

source data. The audit trail can be done by researchers consulted the research findings with external parties to assess the credibility of data collection methods, findings and interpretations that are made. Selected external parties are people who understand and independent phenomena. Another way to enhance credibility is thick and rich description. The credibility of the results of qualitative research can be maintained in a manner described in detail and clear research findings. Therefore, researchers must be able to describe in detail about the research setting, participant, research themes, the search process and the interpretation of data. And the last one is peer debriefing. The credibility of the research results can also be improved by conducting a review of the data and research activities based on the familiarity of researchers on the phenomenon under study. All of the nine procedures should not necessarily be applied at once. Research can select multiple procedures in accordance with the conditions in the field and focus of research

The third is external validity. External validity is defined by Abernethy & Chua [22] as the generalisability of results from the research to the wider population, setting or times. External validity is achieved if there is a clear description and interpretation of the study. Therefore, research should be clear, detailed, systematic and reliable. Two aspects of external validity is that its contribution to the theory should be clear and the contribution of field research should be able to be generalized. In qualitative research, external validity is identical to transferability. However, should be noted that the truth of data reality according qualitative research is not singular, but plural and are subject to human construction, molded in a person as a result of mental processing in individuals with different backgrounds. If there are ten researchers with different backgrounds examine the same object will get ten findings. Therefore, the transferability in qualitative research means the ability to transfer lessons learn from the research. Besides the issue of validity, reliability in qualitative research is also noteworthy. Reliability or dependability in qualitative research is the similarity of the results of measurement or observation of the facts or reality of life when they were measured or observed again in a different time. Tools and the way to measure or observe play an equal important role. Measurement reliability can be viewed from two aspects of reliability in data collection and reliability of data analysis [25].

Reliability in data collection should have a strong theoretical basis, the need for objectivity and distance from preconception to observe and accept the challenge and the certainty that the researchers who began this type of research, know the nature of the threat to reliability. Therefore, it is done through interviews and observations, while reliability in the data analysis has two important phases namely attaching the data and draw conclusions

Conclusion

Accounting research receives criticism linked to the least of value of the practice of accounting or accounting development as an academic discipline. This occurs because of differences in interests between actors in accounting. The main focus of accounting research is not on how to solve any issue with that contained in the accounting practice but lies in academic career and reputation, one of which lies in the achievement of the publication. Status of accounting researchers determined more on the quality of the journal where the result of their researches published in comparison to the quality of the problem or its findings. But only a small number of journals accept articles that use qualitative research. It is thought to be caused by the doubt concerning scientific level of a qualitative research comparing with quantitative research.

There are many debates about the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative research. However, in fact, the selection of whether to use quantitative or qualitative research study depends on the philosophical commitments from researchers. What is more important is that the findings of a study should be accountable scientifically. Therefore, to defend the scientific contents of a study, both quantitative as well as qualitative research study should be done carefully and unbiased.

A careful and unbiased research should consider aspects of validity and reliability. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative research studies must fulfill aspects of validity and reliability. With the fulfillment aspect of validity and reliability, especially in qualitative research, the doubt concerning the scientific contents of a qualitative research can be erased. Thus, the failure of accounting research to improve accounting practices could be resolved through a reliable scientific qualitative research, that is careful and unbiased researches.

References

1. Lincoln Y, Guba EG (1986) *Naturalistic Inquiry*. California: Sage.
2. Inanga EL, Schneider WB (2005) The failure of accounting research to improve accounting practice: a problem of theory and lack of communication. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 16 227–248.
3. Baxter W (1988) Accounting research—academic trends versus practical needs. *The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland*.
4. Hopwood A (1988) Accounting research and accounting practice: the ambiguous relationship between the two In A. Hopwood (Ed.), *Accounting from the outside*. New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc.
5. Lee T (1989) Education, practice and research in accounting: gaps, close loops, bridges and magic accounting. *Acc. Bus. Res.*, 19(75):237-253.
6. Sterling R (1973) Accounting research, education and practice. *J. Acc.*, 3:44-52.
7. Brinn T, Jones M, Pendlebury M (1996) UK accountants' perception of research journal quality. *Acc Bus Res*, 26(3):265-277.
8. Moll J, Major M, Hoque Z (2006) The qualitative research tradition. In Z. Hoque (Ed.), *Methodological Issues in Accounting Research: Theories, Methods and Issues*. London: Spiramus Press Ltd.
9. Young S, Selto F (1993) Explaining cross-sectional workgroup performance differences in a JIT facility: A critical appraisal of a field-based study. *Manage Acc. Res*, 300(26).
10. Hopper T, Powell A (1985) Making Sense Of Research Into the Organizational and Social Aspects of Management Accounting: A Review of Its Underlying Assumptions. *J. Management Studies*, 22(5):429-465.
11. Richardson AJ (2012) Paradigms, theory and management accounting practice: A comment on Parker (forthcoming) "Qualitative management accounting research: Assessing deliverables and relevance". *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 23:83-88.
12. Riduwan A (2007) *Teori Akuntansi: dari Normatif ke Positif, Isu Bebas Nilai, hingga Mitos dan Wacana Redefinisi*. TEMA, 8(1).
13. Deegan C (2004) *Financial Accounting Theory*. Australia: McGraw-Hill.
14. Parker LD (2012) Qualitative management accounting research: Assessing deliverables and relevance. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 23:54-70
15. Finlay L (2006) *Going Exploring: The Nature of Qualitative Research*, *Qualitative Research for Allied Health Professionals: Challenging Choices*. New York: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
16. Chariri A (2009) *Landasan Filsafat dan Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* Paper presented at the Workshop Metodologi Penelitian Kuantitatif dan Kualitatif, Laboratorium Pengembangan Akuntansi (LPA), Fakultas Ekonomi Universitas Diponegoro Semarang.
17. Ahrens T, Dent J (1998) Accounting and organization: realizing the richness of field research. *Journal of Management Accounting Research*, 10, 1-39.
18. Mouritsen J, Thrane S (2006) Accounting network complementarities and the development of inter-organisational relations. *Accounting Organizations and Society*, 31:241-275.
19. Marshal, C. (1985). *Apropriate criteria of trustworthiness and goodness for qualitative research on educational organization*. *Quality and Quantity*, 19, 353-373.
20. Ijiri, Y. (1975) *Theory of accounting measurement* American Accounting Association.
21. Lilis AM (2006) Reliability and Validity in Field Study Research. In Z. Hoque (Ed.), *Methodological Issues in Accounting Research: Theories, Methods and Issues* London: Spiramus Press Ltd.
22. Abernethy M, Chua W (1996) A field study of control system change: the impact of institutional inducement on managerial choice. *Contemporary Accounting Research*, 13(2):569-595.
23. Atkinson A, Shaffir W (1998) Standarts for field research in management accounting. *J. Management Accounting Research*, 10:41-68.
24. Creswell J, Miller DL (2000) Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3):124-130.
25. Otley D (2001) Extending the boundaries of management accounting research: developing systems for performance management. *British Accounting Review*, 33:243-261.