Sejahtera, ulū al-albāb and competing paradigms in qualitative research

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Abstract

Sejahtera (peaceful) *ulū al-albāb* (people with wisdom) is the paradigm that integrates peaceful hearts and minds to attract *al-falah* (victory) and sustainability. This integration requires postgraduate students to integrate *wahy* (revelation) and '*aql* (reasoning) prior to research proposal defence. Majority of the students were prepared for quantitative research projects with dominant '*aql* (reasoning) attitude. The integration requirement has been understood by the students as customizing the quantitative research work with cosmetic of qualitative. The modification has resulted competing paradigms between positivism and constructionism. This study evaluates the presence of competing paradigms in qualitative research reports submitted by students in from 2017-2020. The study uses content analysis to evaluate the presence of competing paradigms in 66 papers. The study finds that the competing paradigms are due to the modification of quantitative research proposal into qualitative research.

Keywords: Qualitative research, competing paradigm, sejahtera

1.   INTRODUCTION

International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in its vision and mission to lead the way for sustainable nation (*ummah*) has used *Sejahtera* (peaceful) *ulū al-albāb* (people with wisdom) as its educational paradigm that integrates peaceful hearts and minds to attract *al-falah* (victory) and sustainability (Hassan, 2010; Sarif, 2014; Razak, 2020; Sariding & Rohmah, 2020). This integration requires all students to integrate *wahy* (revelation) and '*aql* (reasoning) in all assignments (Hashim & Rossidy, 2000; Baba & Zayed, 2015). Postgraduate students are particularly prioritized in contributing the scholarly world with *Sejahtera* (peaceful) values in all disciplines of knowledge and practice.

Qualitative research has different paradigm from quantitative research. The public is aware of research that is using questionnaire through surveys (Miller, 2004; Bell et al, 2009). How about research using interview? Both are just data collection methods (Miller, 2004; Bell et al, 2009; Sinatra et al, 2014). Is it up to the researchers to decide conveniently whether to use survey or interview or both? Many would argue both of acceptable as data collection methods in any research (De Leeuw et al, 1996; Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). Why paradigm of the research matters?

A paradigm in a research represents the worldview or the nature of the world from the belief of an individual. In other word, how an individual sees the world from the individual's perspective and belief system (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008; Ghiara, 2020). It is apparent that a paradigm is of human construction and subject to error of human understanding.

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Why paradigm of research matter? When one conducted a research and published the research findings, it is for the public to read (Curren & Metzger, 2017; Ghiara, 2020). Researchers would not compel readers to accept the research findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ghiara, 2020). However, researchers are hopeful that readers could give due considering to use research findings as insight into policy and practice.

A research involves inquiry or investigation for truth. An inquiry is a process to find truth with the nature of the world and the limits of the surrounding (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Sanney et al, 2020). The belief system of inquirers or researchers shaped the construction of the inquiry process (Held, 2019). If the belief is limited to certain object and event, and later to verify the object and event as truth, then the generalisation of the truth is limited to the belief system. Likewise, if the belief is opened to all objects and events for the sake of understanding the context, then there is no generalisation of the truth. Both belief systems will result in different weightage of the research findings.

Qualitative research has different paradigm from quantitative research due to different belief system in terms of ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. The ontological assumption for qualitative research is to know what is the reality of the context, how the reality work, and how the reality is? The epistemological assumption is about the nature of the relationship between the knower and the known. The methodological assumption is about the knower to find out what is it the belief can be known. Positivism regarded ontology or the reality as naïve reality or apprehendable reality. Unlike constructionism, the reality can be explained by the context as specific constructed realities. From epistemological assumption, the positivism is findings true objectively, while constructionism created the findings. In methodological assumption, positivism verified the hypotheses, whereby construction is hermeneutical or dialectical.

The contents of research at IIUM ought to integrate practical wisdom from conventional studies with revelation (*wahy*) particularly *sejahtera* (peaceful) *ulū al-albāb* (people with wisdom) as research paradigm. The qualitative research is paramount due to the direct relationship between the researchers and the reality of the context to allow for *sejahtera ulū al-albāb* agenda. Thus, this study evaluates the presence of competing paradigms in qualitative research reports submitted by students in from 2017-2020.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge enables nation to advance progressively. Knowledge is not just in minds (*fikr*) but also in hearts (*qalb*) to produce humanity with *Sejahtera* (peaceful) *ulū al-albāb* (people with wisdom) qualities (Hassan, 2010; Hashim & Rossidy, 2000; Sarif, 2014; Baba & Zayed, 2015; Razak, 2020). The inquiry for truth is not just for the minds, for also peaceful hearts and minds to attract *al-falah* (victory) and sustainability (Hassan, 2010; Razak, 2020; Sariding & Rohmah, 2020). The integration of knowledge with *Sejahtera* (peaceful) *ulū al-albāb* is done through the integration *wahy* (revelation) and '*aql* (reasoning) in all inquiries (Hashim & Rossidy, 2000; Baba & Zayed, 2015).

Positivists assumed the reality as naïve realism. Qualitative researchers often confuse positivism with naive realism (Michell, 2003). The primary reason is due to objectivity and reliability concerns in qualitative analysis (Madill et al, 2000). When positivism is understood as naïve realism, it creates competing paradigms (Guba, 1994). Positivism is assumed as critical rationalism (Holtz & Odag, 2020). Paradigmatic controversies are due to mixed of realism and constructionism (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). This is good to avoid biases in qualitative research (Williams, Boylan & Nuna, 2020).

Researchers are confused between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argued that confusion in the paradigms of positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism is due to the understanding of the worldview systems. Positivism is supposed to view the world from objective events and trends without any human interpretation on the objects, events and trends (Lincoln et al, 2011; Holtz & Odag, 2020). Positivists are supposed to verify the reality or naïve realism. Likewise, positivists are falsifying the truth of the reality in the post-positivism (Michell, 2003; Holtz & Odag, 2020). Positivists are verified the reality by stripping the reality, excluding the meaning from human interpretation, and to avoid the etic and emic dilemma through statistical inference. However, constructionism provides the context information, provides insights into the context with human interpretation, and provides meaning and applicability to the context. Therefore, the etic (outside) and emic (inside) dilemma left by positivism is given a meaning.

In terms of extra-paradigm, the theory-ladenness of fact is either verified or falsified the hypotheses. The assumption is that hypotheses are independent with the examination of objective inquiry. Theories and facts are interdependent. If hypotheses are not independent, then facts are merely theoretical 'window,' which

undermined objectivity of positivism (Michell, 2003; Holtz & Odag, 2020). Another problem with extra paradigm is the under determination of theory of problem of induction.

This study postulated that the qualitative research with *sejahtera ulū al-albāb* enhances conventional qualitative research by integrating the practical wisdom with the revelation wisdom into the direct relationship of the researchers and the reality of the context to allow for *sejahtera ulū al-albāb* agenda.

3.   METHODOLOGY

The study analysed the research papers with the integration of practical wisdom approach and revelation approach through word by word (*turath*) content analysis. The analysis involved open coding, axial coding and selective coding of the keywords derived from the research papers. The analysis uses a coding method which comprised of open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The keywords derived from the research papers being given codes in the open coding (Burnard, 1991; Holton, 2007; Birks & Mills, 2015). Researchers may opt to use software such as ATLAS.ti (Friese, 2019). However, this study decided to use a manual coding process.

The next process is axial coding, which is to enhance the categorization of content results in the open coding (Scott & Medaugh, 2017; Richards & Hemphill, 2018). In the open coding, the study conducted two activities, namely familiarizing units of the lines, and conceptualizing the events or incidents, to produce categories of the incidents (Burnard, 1991; Richards & Hemphill, 2018). At axis coding, the study connects the categories with some concepts or models before conducting process analysis (Scott & Medaugh, 2017).

4.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study evaluates the presence of *Sejahtera Ulūl al-albāb* and competing paradigms in qualitative research reports submitted by students from 2017-2020. The study uses content analysis to evaluate the presence of competing paradigms in 66 papers. Table 1 summarises the number of qualitative research reports from 2017-2020.

Table 1. Number of Research Reports (2017-2020)

Academic Year	No of Papers
2017/2018	24
2018/2019	27
2019/2010	15

There were 24 research papers submitted in 2017/2018. Out of 24 research papers, 3 research papers were in the non-finance area. Those non-finance research papers are indicated as RP2, RP6 and RP8. These non-finance research papers contained *sejahtera* and *ulū al-albāb* elements. However, RP2 and RP6 are applying positivism as research paradigm. Nevertheless, a finance research paper RP5 is using constructionism. Table 2 summarises the analysis in terms of *Sejahtera, Ulū al-albāb* and competing paradigms elements in the research papers for Academic Session 2017/2018.

Table 2. Elements of *Sejahtera Ulū al-albāb* and Competing Paradigms in Research Reports (2017/2018)

Code	Sejahtera	Ulūl al-albāb	Positivism	Post-Positivism	Constructionism
RP 1		/	/		
RP 2	/		/		
RP 3			/		
RP 4			/		
RP 5		/			/
RP 6	/		/		
RP 7			/		
RP 8	/	/			/
RP 9		/	/		
RP 10		/	/		
RP 11			/		
RP 12			/		
RP 13			/		
RP 14			/		
RP 15			/		
RP 16			/		
RP 17		/	/		
RP 18			/		

RP 19			/		
RP 20			/		
RP 21			/		
RP 22			/		
RP 23			/		
RP 24			/		
TOTAL	3	6	22	0	2

There were 27 research papers submitted in 2018/2019. Out of 27 research papers, 3 research papers were in the non-finance area. Those non-finance research papers are indicated as RPB10, RPB13 and RPB16. These non-finance research papers contained *sejahtera* and *ulū al-albāb* elements. However, RP2 and RP6 are applying positivism as research paradigm. Nevertheless, a finance research paper RPB17 that is using positivism investigates *ulū al-albāb* on the human artificial intelligence of financial systems. Table 3 summarises the analysis in terms of *Sejahtera, Ulū al-albāb* and competing paradigms elements in the research papers for Academic Session 2018/2019.

Table 3. Elements of *Sejahtera Ulū al-albāb* and Competing Paradigms in Research Reports (2018/2019)

Code	*Sejahtera*	*Ulūl al-albāb*	Positivism	Post-Positivism	Constructionism
RPB 1			/		
RPB 2			/		
RPB 3			/		
RPB 4			/		
RPB 5			/		
RPB 6			/		
RPB 7			/		
RPB 8			/		
RPB 9			/		
RPB 10	/				/
RPB 11			/		
RPB 12			/		
RPB 13		/			/
RPB 14			/		
RPB 15			/		
RPB 16	/	/			/
RPB 17		/	/		
RPB 18			/		
RPB 19			/		
RPB 20			/		
RPB 21			/		
RPB 22			/		
RPB 23			/		
RPB 24			/		
RPB 25			/		
RPB 26			/		
RPB 27			/		
TOTAL	2	3	24	0	4

There were 15 research papers submitted in 2019/2020. There was one paper in the finance concentration. Most of the research papers are in the marketing. Nevertheless, only RPC4 research paper has *sejahtera* and *ulū al-albāb* elements and coherent with constructionism. Table 4 summarises the analysis in terms of *Sejahtera, Ulū al-albāb* and competing paradigms elements in the research papers for Academic Session 2019/2020.

Table 4. Elements of *Sejahtera Ulū al-albāb* and Competing Paradigms in Research Reports (2019/2020)

Code	*Sejahtera*	*Ulūl al-albāb*	Positivism	Post-Positivism	Constructionism
RPC 1			/		
RPC 2			/		
RPC 3			/		
RPC 4	/	/			/
RPC 5			/		
RPC 6			/		
RPC 7			/		
RPC 8			/		
RPC 9			/		
RPC 10			/		
RPC 11			/		

RPC 12			/		
RPC 13			/		
RPC 14			/		
RPC 15			/		
TOTAL	1	1	14	0	1

Most of the research papers developed hypotheses with positivism approach that is to verify the relationship between several variables. After explaining the research objectives, the research paper mentioned the hypotheses of the study. The word "positively influenced" is apparent in the positivism paradigm, which is to verify the relationships. Fig. 1 shows the extract of the research paper RPC1.

> The study explains the relationship between the independent variable, mediating variable and dependent variable. The hypotheses for that study were:
> H1a: Customer satisfaction will be positively influenced by focusing on customers.
> H1b: Customer loyalty will be positively influenced by focusing on customers.
> H2a: Customer satisfaction will be positively influenced by knowledge management.
> H2b: Customer loyalty will be positively influenced by knowledge management.
> H3: Customer loyalty will be positively influenced by customer satisfaction
> Therefore, for this study, the researcher want to investigate more on CRM strategy implementation in another scope of study which was in IHLs and specifically namely on Student-Parent Management within new industry and different type of population. The study used personal interview this research want to know how marketing experts view this issue as she also involved in promoting IHL to attract students to join IHL.

Fig. 1. Extract from RPC1

In another example, the research paper attempted to include *sejahtera* or *ulu al-albab* elements with hypotheses on the relationships among *sejahtera* factors (well-being and happiness). The word "hypothesis" is apparent in the positivism paradigm, which is to verify the relationships. Fig.2 shows the extract of the research paper RPC3.

> The proposed hypothesis for the relationship between psychological well-being or happiness and turnover intention in the current study
> This study defended the explanatory model (constructive) to examine the contextual factors (employment, turnover and commitment to the job) by conducting a telephone interview with the recruitment manager who interacts in the experiment to reach a deeper understanding of the experience, in order to extract the demand the knowledge necessary to determine employment and turnover, and to determine the impact of practices Recruitment to acquire talented employees and explore the contribution of recruitment to the turnover.
> The study found that recruitment process has an effective role in attracting qualified employees regardless of the type of system or institution.

Fig. 2. Extract from RPC3

Another example, the research paper attempted to use content analysis on selected literature but ended up with positivism research questions. The positivism element is apparent with the repeated word "efficiency" and "satisfaction" which suggests verification of relationships between "efficiency" and "satisfaction." Fig.3 shows the extract of the research paper RPC13.

> This study is based on content analysis and is based on reviewing research between 2014 and 2017
> The study was conducted on 1114 students through the distribution of an electronic questionnaire, and other data obtained from the reports of the e-learning evaluation were obtained by experts.
> This research will answer the following questions:
> 1. How the efficiency of educational content affects student satisfaction?
> 2. How does the efficiency of the online platform affect student satisfaction?
> 3. How does the efficiency of the administrative staff affect student satisfaction?
> 4. How the efficiency of the financial system affects student satisfaction?
> 5. How the efficiency of the academic staff affects student satisfaction?
> 6. Are there other aspects of the efficiency of distance education that affect student satisfaction? And how it affects student satisfaction?
>
> we use the qualitative approach because we need to know reality closely, search for the truth, and explore it and describe it in depth, and considering that the truth in this type of scientific research methodology is different according to the study community, and that the facts cannot be one like the quantitative approach that considers that the truth is one.

The findings on three batches of researchers who attended training in qualitative research course were confused between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. The researchers were attempted to explore the reality but limited with certain objects and events. The researchers were really doing what are positivists are supposed to verify the reality or naïve realism (Michell, 2003; Holtz & Odag, 2020). The main reason for such confusion is when the researchers trapped in the attempt to verify the reality by stripping the reality and then to fill in the vacuum with human interpretation. By doing that, the researchers were trying to bring together the etic (outside) and emic (inside) dilemma with a meaning (Lincoln et al, 2011; Holtz & Odag, 2020).

5. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Theoretically, *sejahtera* and *ulu al-albab* contributes to the mainstream qualitative research paradigms as alternative paradigm along with positivism, post-positivism, realism and constructionism, not as competing paradigms, but as integrating and complementary paradigms. The essence of *sejahtera* and *ulu al-albab* paradigms is based on spirituality quotients. Practically, *sejahtera* and *ulu al-albab* contributes to Quranic method of text (*turath*) content analysis to allow for the integration of spirituality essence.

This study recommends the development of systematic module with *sejahtera* and *ulu al-albab* and Quranic method of text (*turath*) content analysis. The module will be accompanied with training packages for qualitative researchers at all stages.

6. CONCLUSION

The study focuses *sejahtera* and *ulu al-albab* and Quranic method of text (*turath*) content analysis for qualitative research studies. The two constructs are not competing with the existing qualitative research paradigms. The presence of this paradigm is to provide spirituality dimension into the research paradigm. The primary reason for contributing spirituality dimension into qualitative research paradigm is to make the research closer to sustainability and humanity agenda. This study uses *turath* content analysis to evaluate the presence of *sejahtera, ulu al-albab* elements and competing paradigms in 66 papers. The study found the researchers are not able to integrate into the qualitative research although they have attended training in qualitative research course. The researchers need systematic and modular training to integrate *sejahtera* and *ulu al-albab* into ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions.

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