On the Role of Values in Educational Research: a Critique of Two Research Studies

Plamen Kushkiev

School of Continuing Studies, YUELI, York University, Toronto, Canada
Author's email: plamen@yorku.ca

Abstract

This paper aims to critique the conceptual framework and paradigmatic nature of two studies that report on empirical data to draw conclusions and claim transferability. The focus is placed on the influence of the raft of beliefs and values the researcher brings to the process of research. My main argument is that research can never be value-free, because research frameworks and designs are underpinned by a set of assumptions about the nature of social reality, what good knowledge is, and how to attain it. Researchers are expected to be self-reflexive and state how their values affect the choice of topic and overall design of their inquiry. In this paper, I deconstruct the theoretical underpinnings and methodological decisions the researchers make to shed light on the influential role of values on the process of educational inquiry. To put my discussion in context, I opt to critique Hariri's (2014) study, which investigates TEFL university instructors' emotional attitudes to their students, fellow teachers and workplace, and Akbari *et al*. (2017) exploring EFL teachers' emotion regulation behaviour in the classroom. Even though the two studies seem to be conducted within a disparate research tradition, I argue that the researchers have similar underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions that necessitate the choice of a particular methodology. I therefore suggest that the researchers' personal, social and competency values determine the selection of a research methodology. I suggest that researchers should be introspective and explain how their beliefs and hunches have influenced the overall process of inquiry, and what measures were taken to minimize the effects of these preconceived assumptions. The research findings might have wider implications for evidence-based teaching and policy construction.

Keywords: research paradigm, ontology, epistemology, methodology, axiology, values

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1. Introduction

This paper is intended to critically analyze the conceptual framework, research design and implications of two studies, exploring (a) TEFL (teachers of English as a foreign language) university instructors' emotional attitudes to their students, colleagues and workplace (Hariri, 2014); and (b) EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers' emotion regulation behavior in the classroom (Akbari *et al.*, 2017). I argue that both studies are conducted within the interpretivist tradition with similar underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, presumably formed by the authors' educational background, terminal values (Greenbank, 2003), or professional context. The adoption of a certain research tool on the part of the researcher and the size of the data collected cannot serve as a clear indicator of the paradigmatic nature of the study. The choice of a research paradigm is generally unconscious and is substantially influenced by the researcher's perceptions of reality and ethics. Therefore, this paper will also discuss the personal, social and competency values (*ibid*) or biases that may have influenced Hariri and Akbari *et al.*'s overall research process- the choice of topic, formulating research questions, conducting the study, analyzing the results and stating implications. In doing so, I find it incumbent on acknowledging that my position as an educational practitioner is that research cannot be value-free; the values of the researchers are embedded in every step of the process. Thus, the critical analysis of the two research studies this essay contains is a reflection of *my* perception of the social reality and social research, so the critique I

present thereby shall be construed as a manifestation of the reflexive approach I adopt as I strive to take a stance how *my* instrumental values affect the interpretation of Hariri and Akbari *et al*.'s studies.

In the same vein, I suggest that the claim for value-laden research is particularly valid for studies conducted within the interpretivist tradition, which employs relativist and anti-foundationalist ontology (Guba, 1990) and subjectivist epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Interpretivist researchers believe multiple realities exist and their research participants construct knowledge in context through their subjective worldview. Similarly, Mack (2010) posits, phenomenology as a philosophical movement, has a strong influence on the interpretivist paradigm, as the main aim of phenomenologists is to take into account the subjective interpretations of human beings about their social reality. The two articles this paper critiques present two examples of researchers adopting a qualitative approach (though one of them uses numerical data) *vis-à-vis* their topic of interest, situated in a dynamic reality, where 'the relationship between the knower and the known is inextricably connected.'(Yilmaz, 2013, p.312). This leads to the critique of the first research study.

2.Research Paper A

Hariri, M. (2014) TEFL university instructors' emotional attitudes towards their students, colleagues and workplace. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature* [online]. Vol. 3(3). [Accessed 25 October 2017]. Available at http://www.journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJALEL/article/view/1042.

2.1. Project Underpinnings

In this article, Hariri (2014) aims to explore the perceptions and emotional attitudes of TEFL university instructors' towards their students, fellow instructors and workplace- a seemingly ambitious task considering the fact that the author has written only six pages to present the project, explore the existing literature, justify her research methodology, discuss her findings and propose implications for further research. Each of the stakeholders mentioned in the title of the paper could constitute a distinct research study; attempting to explore attitudes of instructors towards students, colleagues *and* workplace in the same study appears to be too challenging a task for such a small-scale study.

The article presents the results of a questionnaire, consisting of 56 items divided into 10 categories, which was completed by 30 Iranian university instructors. The paper somewhat follows the established standards for publishing academic work as it contains an abstract with keywords listed, an introduction to the context and problem, part of which is the literature review, a section (inappropriately) named 'Methodology', two distinct sections on results and discussion, and a conclusion. There is no reference to her ontological, epistemological, axiological or methodological assumptions (Yilmaz, 2013). Instead, she briefly mentions that other researchers designed her only research tool, a questionnaire designed by other researchers to explore *her* participants' views. There is no justification as to why she considers this research instrument most appropriate for her agenda. However, her study is in light with King and Mackey's (2016) call for more

replication studies in social sciences, especially ones that are *actual* replications, not just *conceptual* ones. Even though original studies generally receive a wider support in terms of funding and recognition, King and Mackey (2016) claim replication studies can also add value to the body of knowledge 'whether they confirm and extend findings, or whether they identify problems' (*ibid*, p. 215).

Hariri (2014) claims generalizability on the basis of the results she arrives at: 'Based on the obtained results, one can draw the conclusion that EFL teachers need to talk collaboratively about their experiences and emotions.' (Hariri, 2014, p.33). It is suggested that such a claim could not be made resting on a single study that adopts a ready-made research tool, with a sample of 30 participants. Furthermore, the author fails to specify which EFL teachers she refers to- are they the ones who teach at the university, or all Iranian EFL teachers, or perhaps all EFL instructors in all settings? Her findings cannot support such ambitious claims for epistemological objectivity without stating her own assumptions. It can therefore be construed that Hariri (2014) confuses her conceptual framework with the paradigmatic nature of her study, which is in line with Troudi's (2010) claim that 'the distinction between the paradigmatic nature of the study and its theoretical framework is not obvious and difficult to make.'(p.315). The theoretical framework is the intellectual lens the researcher is wearing when investigating the research topic. It is indeed this cognitive construct, a synthesis of researcher's perception of social reality and phenomena, previous knowledge and subjective experience of knowledge attaining,

informed by the existing body of literature, which underpins the explorer's research agenda. Hariri (2014) does not elaborate on her understanding of what her conceptual framework is; rather, it appears that she tries to emulate previous studies conducted in similar contexts with the very same research instrument. Her motivation and interest to explore this topic may not come as a result of her assumptions about reality and knowledge, but in an attempt to satisfy an academic requirement to produce some form of research.

Similarly, she does not state what her rationale is to conduct this study, nor does she inform us of her values and assumptions that may have influenced the overall research process: 'the sample included in the study was not selected randomly; therefore, the generalizability of the results should be done with caution.'(Hariri, 2014, p.38). By failing to elaborate on her conceptual framework and underlying assumptions, the author falls in an ontological and epistemological trap, letting the choice of her research tool guide the process of research. To support my claim, I refer to Crotty (2003), who posits there are four basic elements of any research process-epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, methods, and 'we need to spell out carefully what we mean by each of them.'(p.2). Hariri does not offer us her interpretation of the way she sees the social reality (ontology), which would facilitate our understanding of the reasons she decided on a questionnaire- does she think that her context resembles all other contexts? Does she believe the type of knowledge she obtains (epistemology) is generalizable and

thus applicable to similar contexts?

Hariri (2014) names the first section of the paper 'Introduction', in which she attempts to present a rather brief overview of the existing literature on teachers' cognitive and pedagogical concerns, the definition of emotion, failing to state that there isn't an agreed upon definition of emotion; instead, she makes another unsupported claim without any relevance to what has been previously articulated: 'Emotional aspect of a teacher can affect his/her professional development.'(p.33). What is professional development? What is affect? Is a correlation being sought between emotional aspect and teacher development? If so, this research scenario may be classified as a research agenda within a distinct tradition, because her current paper's aim is to explore instructors' attitudes, not to prove a causal relationship. I believe such a claim made in the introductory part of the paper is an indication of how her personal and social values might have informed and influenced her research agenda. However, the reason she utilizes other researchers' study instrument to investigate instructors' emotional attitudes remains vague. Is she trying to implement some policy about teacher professional development at her institution?

Finally, having as a research agenda the exploration of tertiary instructors' emotional attitudes, the author could have referred to other, more closely related sources such as Goetz *et al.* (2006) and the social cognitive theory of academic emotions, for instance. Teacher emotions and university instructors' emotional experiences are a growing field with a relatively rich body of literature (Abou Assali & Kushkiev, 2016); Hariri (2014)

could have consulted other sources to be able to better conceptualize her study design.

2.2 Research Questions

The literature on research paradigms and research design is replete with definitions and terminology, which may pose a conundrum to novice researchers. Researchers are expected to establish the way they view the reality (ontological assumptions), what there is to know, or the nature of knowledge (epistemological assumptions), the philosophical framework of their research (methodology), and the practical tools they utilize to collect/generate data (methods). This set of philosophical stances is often called a paradigm, so research studies tend to be situated within a well-established paradigm-positivist, interpretivist, critical, transformative, feminist, etc. (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Some foundational knowledge is expected when conducting research for one's research to be deemed relevant. Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (1982) refer to paradigms as 'the basic belief system or worldview' (p.107), which inevitably has a direct influence on the researcher's choice of research outline. Since each and every research project is underpinned by a set of assumptions, it becomes evident that the researcher's combination of values determines the *what* and *how* of their research project. If ontological assumptions inform epistemological assumptions, these in turn give rise to methodological assumptions, which may determine the choice of method. However, in reality this transition may not be this smooth and straightforward. Researchers' axiological (role of values) assumptions are at play, too. Similarly, Choy (2014) asserts

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quantitative researchers tend to start with a broad area of professional or personal interest, which they narrow down after reviewing the existing body of knowledge to be able to coin hypotheses. This process appears to be cyclical, rather than linear, so the researcher's pre-set values and assumptions are thought to influence the overall process of inquiry to a large extent. Therefore, the movement towards value neutrality in research may remain futile; instead, bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2010) and attempting to minimize the possible effect of one's values on their research is a practice educational researchers are expected to adopt.

In contrast, Hariri (2014) fails to acknowledge her positionality, the way she sees her reality or what sort of knowledge she is aiming to obtain. When no ontological or epistemological position has been declared, and no research questions formulated concerns about the validity and reliability of her research can be raised. If her objective is to explore emotional attitudes, then her ontological position is that the reality is socially constructed, so the knowledge-making process is a product of social interaction between the subject and the object- subjectivist epistemological assumptions. With no research questions declared, she might confuse her readers as to what exactly she is trying to explore- a causal relation between emotions and performance/affect and professional development, or simply investigating the instructors' views of their emotional responses. There are no grand tour questions or sub-questions mentioned for that sake. Thus, the readers of her article would perceive the raft of beliefs and inclinations Hariri (2014)

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brings to her research project differently.

2.3 Literature review

The literature review section in each academic work is the critical representation of the existing body of knowledge on the topic being researched. Thody (2006) suggests that the word 'literature' includes all secondary sources for one's research that provide information 'but are not specifically produced for one's current research topic.' (p.101). She also suggests that the process is linear and starts with recording and summarizing information and facts, and culminates in integrating, analyzing and criticizing (*ibid*, p.103) other researchers' work, study findings and implications. The perspective the literature review is approached from may determine the trajectory on how to go about exploring the phenomenon in question. Furthermore, Troudi (2010) claims that 'the constructs you are investigating in your research questions need to be defined and located in the related literature so that the researcher's view and understanding of the concept/s being researched are established, explained and justified.' (p.316). What is more, Thody (2006) refers to the literature and methodology review as a 'vital demonstration of the validity of your research.'(p.90), supporting the claim that no research study is complete without a proper review of the existing knowledge in the area for the researcher to be able to successfully situate her research findings and prospectively contribute to that knowledge. Hariri (2014) presents the results of several studies in what appears to be a haphazard manner, without a clear logical relation between them or how these pertain to her research

agenda. To be precise, she reports on a study, in which nine Japanese EFL teachers were interviewed, and suggested a theoretical framework of emotional labor and feeling rules. There is no mention whether those teachers were university instructors- they could be primary school teachers, for instance, which presupposes a different reality. She also includes the findings of a study, which investigated 108 German teachers' emotional expression when interacting with students of different ages; yet another partially irrelevant reference due to the nature of that emotional expression with students of various ages compared to Hariri's interest in exploring university lecturers' attitudes. What follows is an account of four distinct research studies and their findings, two of which with Iranian teachers, but none with tertiary level instructors. All four studies explore correlations between teacher emotions and their efficacy, emotional intelligence and success or emotional intelligence and self-efficacy- an agenda quite distinct from Hariri's, whose attempt to situate her research findings within the body of literature needs reinforcement. Without the element of analysis and integration within her research framework, Hariri does not justify the selection of these sources neither does she substantiate any claims for valid knowledge. In fact, by adding these research topics to her literature review chapter she indicates her embedded interest in the topic and implicitly professes a correlation between the influence of emotions on academic performance; in this case, an experimental research design would be a better fit for her tacitly implied research agenda as it becomes evident that she hypothesizes a positive

relation between emotional regulation and self-efficacy. In doing so, she demonstrates the roles of her values influencing the process of selecting literature sources and conceptualizing what and how to be researched.

2.4 Methodology

As mentioned earlier, methodology constitutes the notion of a paradigm along with ontology and epistemology. It is a particular research design that guides the researcher in selecting the methods to use to collect/generate data. Though it may not always be this seamless, I reckon methodological assumptions are informed by the researchers' view of reality and knowledge attaining. Thus, I understand methodology to be a philosophical construct that suggests the use of a practical tool (method), not the other way round. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) contend that a large number of texts provide no clear definition of methodology and methods, as some texts even use them interchangeably. In addition, Tight (2003) claims that while these terms may share a common base, methods are techniques for data collection and analysis, such as interviews or observations; whereas methodologies refer to the underlying approaches adopted by researchers. Similarly, Cousin (2009) refers to methods as tools and procedures we use for our inquiries, whereas methodology is about the framework within which they sit. Hariri (2014) does designate a section named 'Methodology', but does not discuss her methodological assumptions at all; instead, she chooses to add two subsections-'Participants' and 'Instrument'.

According to Yilmaz (2013), 'quantitative and qualitative research designs differ in terms of their epistemological, theoretical and methodological underpinnings' (p.312). I suggest that the type of data gathered or generated could serve as an indicator for the researcher's underpinning assumptions or what the paradigmatic nature of her study is. To be precise, research that uses quantitative data is thought to be informed by an objectivist epistemology that seeks to prove universal laws by assuming a static reality. In other words, quantitative researchers tend to assume that there is a world out there waiting to be explored and explained through statistical or experimental means. Their framework is expected to be value-free or value-neutral and the object of research is independent of the researcher. In light of this statement, it cannot be assumed that Hariri (2014) construes the social reality as observer independent or value-free. In fact, her research agenda fits well within the opposing tradition, informed by constructivist epistemology and subjectivist ontology. An indication for this assertion is the fact that as a university instructor aiming to study other instructors' emotional attitudes, she might suggest that knowledge attaining is context-sensitive and value-laden. Each participant may interpret and express their emotions in a distinct way. The researcher could not completely detach herself from the object of her study, her work context and academic role being quite similar to her study participants. Therefore, her social reality necessitates the adoption of a set of values and principles that may be at play when she analyzes her research data and makes implications.

In the abstract of the article, Hariri (2014) reports on her using a research tool, which 'was mainly based on a pre-designed questionnaire to 'ask attitudes of the participants' (p.33). Is this questionnaire based on some other sources or hypotheses? She only refers to an attitude questionnaire, attached in the appendix part, which she uses to collect data. However, Hariri (2014) does not elaborate on her rationale for using this particular questionnaire with 10 categories. The selection of these categories may have been influenced by her choice of research design, which is underpinned by her underlying stances or hypotheses. It is suggested that her assumptions are informed by her interpretation of what the instructors' emotional attitudes might be towards their social ethos. It can also be understood that the researcher is limiting her participants' responses by asking them to rate their attitude from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' rather than elaborate on their perceptions of their emotional expression.

Surveys and questionnaires are readily available tools to collect data that do not require a significant amount of time to devise and administer, and 'the responses can be tabulated within a short timeframe' (Choy, 2014, p.101). Though the numerical data they yield is often used to hypothesize a correlation between variables, surveys have the major disadvantage of reducing human profiles and experiences to mere numbers. It is also the case that surveys generally need to draw on data from many participants to be able to establish any generalizable connection between the variables at play. It is therefore my position that a semi-structured interview could capture the views of her study participants

more profoundly, generating sufficient data to analyze.

Similarly, Greenbank (2003) claims that researchers 'will inevitably be influenced by their underlying ontological and epistemological' (p.792) assumptions when they decide on particular research methods for their study. Such assumptions 'will be influenced by researchers' values, particularly instrumental values relating to competency' (*ibid*, p.792). With no such statement made in her article, Hariri (2014) opens the door for her readers to interpret her rationale for conducting this study and its significance, which may deviate significantly from her original research focus and agenda. As for the participants, there is no information whether they were handpicked for particular reasons; the author could justify her choice more explicitly.

In short, Hariri (2014) decides on a quantitative tool collecting (possibly) non-randomized samples of data to explore the views of her participants, which raises concerns about the data triangulation and researcher bias. When there is no evidence of triangulation of certain research findings, issues of credibility, trustworthiness and reliability may arise (Yilmaz, 2013). In this way, I conclude that her aims to produce research based on quantitative data may override her research values, which, I believe, are embedded in the interpretivist tradition. The author could be more reflexive about the possible clash of her own values with the agenda she is pursuing. If she pursues an objectivist agenda, distancing herself from the study participants and their responses, Hariri (2014) could adopt 'layering' (King & Mackey, 2016, p. 209), or considering the

philosophical underpinnings of her methodology 'from various epistemological stances' (*ibid*) in order to properly address issues of objectivity and possible bias.

2.5 Prospects and Implications

Further to the claims made in the previous part, one can deduce that the questionnaire is a readily accessible and relatively cheap instrument, often adopted by positivist researchers. This tool is used for 'collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data', according to Cohen *et al.* (2007, p.245). Though it is generally associated with the scientific paradigm, it can also be used within the interpretivist tradition if structured properly to serve the purpose of the study. In Hariri's case, the data generated are too parsimonious to be able to draw proper conclusions from her investigation. All she does is translate the statistical information from 10 charts into written discourse with almost no element of analysis, except for one statement, which reads: 'Generally speaking, their attitude towards their career was positive, although social and cultural issues were effective in their treatments too.' (p.38). It is the first and only such statement that acknowledges the role of values in her participants' responses as well as in her interpretation of the results. Hariri does not explain how the results obtained and implications made link back to the literature she consults to inform her study.

The final part, 'Conclusion', seems to offer us some thought-provoking insight into Hariri's interpretation of the data. She calls on 'educational organizations to allocate

special values for emotional attitudes of their instructors and to arrange some meetings to ask their problems… in order to reach better results in teaching' (p.38). Firstly, the author does not specify what she means by 'educational organizations', and how she sees them allocating values for emotional attitudes. Since she hasn't defined her understanding of values, nor has she stated her position on values, her call for institutional change is far-fetched and a subject of study within the critical tradition. Secondly, even though she acknowledges that the study lacks a vast number of participants, without specifying what *vast* number to her is. She informs us that the generalizability of the results should be done with caution- a broad and possibly unjustified claim, based on a single study, informed by the researcher's social-constructivist position and influenced by her instrumental values. There is no indication that she seeks generalizability and whether such a claim could be sustained based on her research agenda.

In summary, Hariri's (2014) study and findings could be more reliable provided that she (1) limited the scope of the study and focused on one stakeholder; (2) stated her philosophical position and been reflexive about how her values influenced the research process; (3) used a different research tool such as a semi-structured interview to triangulate her findings; (4) allocated more space in the article for discussion, interpretations and critical analysis by linking her findings back to the literature rather than paraphrasing the results; and (5) proofread the text and rectified all grammatical errors. I posit that Hariri's study design is a suitable example of the influence of values on

the overall research process.

3.Research Article B

Akbari, R., Samar, R., Kiany, Gh. & Tahernia, M. (2017) A qualitative study of EFL teachers' emotion regulation behavior in the classroom. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* [online], Vol. 7 (4). [Accessed 25 October 2017]. Available at http://www.academypublication.com/ojs/index.php/tpls/article/view/tpls0704311321

3.1 Project Underpinnings

Akbari *et al.* (2017) attempt to explore the nature of emotion regulation behavior of EFL teachers in some private and public language schools in Iran. They conducted semi-structured interviews with 18 EFL teachers in Farsi, which were later translated into English and transcribed for emerging categories. The authors claim correspondence of the categories to the Process Model of Emotion Regulation proposed by Gross (1998).

The Introduction presents a well-supported overview of the researchers' conceptual framework for their study; they build their argument on the basis of the growing interest in teacher emotions and emotion regulation behavior in both mainstream education and second language teaching. Despite the rising interest and number of studies exploring teacher emotions, Akbari *et al.* (2017) emphasize the fact that 'research into this area is still in its infancy in teacher education, and the EFL/ESL context is not an exception in this regard' (p.311). They further refer to studies on pre-service teacher education programs not paying due attention to the interplay between teachers' emotions and practice of teaching. Such references, I reckon, may tacitly indicate their interest in professing change in teacher education courses towards incorporating training on teacher

emotional regulation. If this is the case, their research agenda transcends the permeable boundaries of the interpretivist paradigm they conduct their study within, and demonstrate the influence of their conception and pre-set assumptions on the way they conceptualize the topic of interest. In the same vein, it is worth highlighting the fact that they do not only present an overview of their theoretical outline, but also attempt to present a clear path on how their philosophical framework informs the research design in a logical and sustained way. This is in line with Wellington *et al.* (2005), who profess the cultivation of a three-step approach to approaching research- 'theorizing theory, focusing on focus, and preparing a research proposal' (p.56). Further to this standpoint, in the introductory part, Akbari *et al.* (2017) aim to differentiate between the role of their project underpinnings from the assumptions they hold about the nature of knowledge and how to obtain valid data.

What they do not demonstrate, however, is whether they take a stand and reflect on their own values and perceptions of the social constructs they refer to. For instance, they state that their study 'seeks to unveil the nature of emotion regulation behaviors among EFL teachers by exploring the emotion regulation strategies adopted by them in the classroom' (p.312). This may be construed as a way to advocate for teachers to adopt certain strategies to respond, not just react to emotional experiences in the classroom. One possible theory the authors may inherently write in favor of is Emotional Intelligence (EI or EQ). The term is generally attributed to Peter Solovey and John Mayer who coined the

term in 1990 (Abou Assali & Kushkiev, 2016). However, it was Daniel Goleman who popularized the theory in his book Emotional Intelligence, published in 1996, and charted the field for individuals, in general, and educators, in particular, towards adopting the tenets of EQ to cultivate a more sustained emotional regulation.

In a similar manner, Akbari *et al.* (2017) could be implicitly referring to Weiner's Attribution theory of motivation and emotion, which contends that 'causal thoughts determine feelings and feelings, in turn, guide behavior' (Graham & Williams, 2009, p.22). As mentioned in the previous chapter, if researchers do not demonstrate reflexivity and explicitly state what values and instrumental factors have influenced their work, the readers might interpret the research agenda in multiple ways. This is in line with Boyd's (2000) assertion that virtually all aspects of education are value-laden and debatable (p.350). In addition, May (2001) posits values are embedded in a number of research stages- from the initial interest of researcher, the aims and design of the research, the process of data collection and data analysis to the publishing of research and dissemination of findings.

In short, I speculate that Akbari *et al.* (2017*)* allow for their values to permeate their theoretical and research framework and tacitly invite for educational change in the form of incorporating the study of emotional regulation into teacher education programs. Such a call, whether implicit or explicit, I reckon, evokes the features of action research. The paradigmatic nature of their study will be analyzed in the following sections.

3.2 Research Questions

Wellington *et al.* (2005) suggest differentiating between the general area of the research project, the focus of the research, and the questions that you are seeking to address. They also claim that one, two or three clearly articulated research questions should be sufficient for each study. In contrast, Akbari *et al.* (2017) do not formulate any research questions per se, but make the aim of their study explicit. In the previous sections, I referred to the fact that educational researchers are expected to demonstrate understanding of the underlying principles of social research, and the main terms used to define the paradigmatic nature of the study. This will not only situate their research and findings within an existing and well-established research tradition, but it will also allow them to reflect on their underpinning assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how to attain it. Educational research, as a social endeavor, presupposes the role of the human factor, because research is done by and for humans. Humans possess values, which mold their conceptualizations of knowledge claims and ethics, or as Carr (2000) puts it-'values are subjective beliefs to which the concepts of validity, objectivity, rationality and truth do not apply' (p.441).

It is not the purpose of this paper to enter into a debate between rationalists and constructivists; both traditions profess their ideas of obtaining knowledge through a set of criteria. The area that bears highlighting is that any research endeavor is value-laden, even empiricism and objectivity, which is a value itself (May, 1997). Therefore, a

value-laden approach to education is suggested, allowing the educational researchers to offer a rational explanation for the choice of their research design. Nonetheless, Akbari *et al*. make no such attempt and render their research open to criticism as they do not acknowledge that value-neutrality is unsustainable.

3.3 Literature Review

Booth *et al.* (2012) argue that 'without a literature review, you will not be able to understand your topic fully' (p.1). Such a review is important to be able to comprehend what has been written on the topic, what approaches have been applied to investigate the topic and eventually avoid the risk of reinventing the wheel. Akbari *et al*. (2017) present a rather extensive and thorough review of the literature on emotions and emotional regulation behavior, while offering their synthesis and an element of analysis of the body of literature. They divide the section into three subsections-background, definitional issues, and models of emotion regulation. The authors provide the definition of emotions and the two prominent roles they play, on the inter-personal and intra-personal level. Such reference admittedly implies adherence to the aforementioned notion of emotional intelligence and how emotional regulation leads to a more sustained self-awareness and relationship management. :'Generally speaking, it is hypothesized that emotion regulation is a key determinant of good health and effective performance.' (*ibid*, p.312). They further make a claim by stating that 'the educational discourse community has now come

to the understanding that emotions are, undoubtedly, integral to any educational system.' (*ibid*, p.312). Evidently, what they are aiming to achieve in the literature review part is argue in favor of revising the current curricula and syllabi of teacher training programs and including a strand in teacher emotional regulation. I believe such a claim is logical and necessary if consciously made and explicitly accounted for in the research paper. The authors then provide an overview of the definition of emotion regulation, and reinstate the fact that it 'mostly occurs in a social context' (p.312). What I find problematic, though, is the discrepancy between their explicit research agenda-exploring perceptions, and the implicit underpinning assumptions to instigate a change in the teacher-training curriculum.

The final subsection discusses three models of emotional regulation. The first one is the Hot/Cool model, according to which 'teachers who successfully regulate their emotions change the 'hot' representation of the immediate situation to a cool one by ignoring the stimulus…'(Akbari *et al.,* p.313). This model, they claim, may influence the way teachers handle their work experiences in terms of emotion regulation. I suggest that such an analysis might indicate the researchers' imbedded interest and possible application of the model in practice. As they do not inform us whether teachers or teacher trainers have already adopted such a model, we can assume that they preach in favor of its application. The second and third model of emotion regulation they refer to is the Resource or Strength model, and Gross's (1998) the Process Model of Emotion Regulation that

explain the process of emotion generation, maturity and response modulation.

Overall, the literature review section is comprehensive and contains the researchers' efforts to situate their study in the body of knowledge and contribute to the existing literature by linking back their research findings to it. The authors claim that there is a dearth of research on emotion regulation, so their study will shed more light on the concept.

3.4 Methodology and Method

The authors of the paper I critique do not devote a distinct part to methodology and render their research design open to various interpretations. Methodology, as explained earlier, is a philosophical construct that guides the researcher to the choice of method, and is a part of the research paradigm constituents. Similarly, Thomas (2013) claims paradigms are not straightforward views about the social world. He also contends that paradigms are 'positions on the best ways to think about and study the social world' (*ibid*, p.110). In other words, they way the researchers see the world in a *best* way is their own subjective perception of the social surroundings. Such perceptions may play a vital role when deciding on a particular research design and a choice of methodology. Therefore, by failing to discuss the researchers' methodological assumptions, it can be suggested that it was the choice of method that informed the choice of methodology, which may have a bearing on the sample size. This implies the authors' reliance on the use of a certain research instrument, and raises concerns about the influence of the Akbari *et al*.'s

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research value and ethics. For example, they write that purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants according to pre-specified criteria. We might ponder, however, why this particular set of criteria was agreed upon, and whether this choice could be a clear manifestation of value-ladenness. It could be that the researchers opted for this particular sample and demographic, anticipating a certain outcome, or participants holding similar opinions to theirs. Such a practice contradicts Wrigley's (1976) assertion that researchers should distinct their opinions from the study participants' expressed views, and make their judgments explicit.

A final point about Akbari *et al.*'s limited reflexivity exhibited is the statement they make about ensuring the interviews would yield a multitude of teachers' emotion regulation strategies, which implies researcher bias as no rational explanation is offered. Such a statement further reinstates the multidimensionality of the researchers' value systems and how the latter constitute their perceptions of knowledge, research design and selections of research tools.

Akbari *et al*. (2017) inappropriately name the section 'Method' and divide it into participants, instrument, procedure and data analysis subsections. This should be the part, in which the researchers elaborate on their assumptions and justify the choice of research methodology. This would facilitate the reader's understanding as to why they opt for semi-structured interviews, and the reasons they derive questions from 'a comprehensive review of the related literature' (p.314). So, it can be perceived that Akbari *et al.*'s

relativist ontological assumptions (they are part of the social reality they are exploring) and subjectivist epistemological assumptions (each participant constructs their understanding of the social phenomena) give rise to the implicit choice of methodology and hence the selection of semi-structured interviews. This is in line with Siyam (2018), who asserts qualitative methods are suitable to study a phenomenon in its context. Because researchers are part of the reality they attempt to explore, they are expected to acknowledge the influence of values and adopt a 'value-laden approach to educational research' as Greenbank (2013, p.795) hypothesizes in order to lessen the effect of possible bias.

Another point worth making is the authors' attempt to validate their findings by adopting quantitative methods after the interview transcripts were analyzed using 'conceptual content analysis' (Tight, 2003, p.189), which is utilized in all research, whether explicitly or implicitly. The authors express awareness of issues of reliability and inter-rated reliability as they ask 'a colleague familiar with the research analytic framework' (p.316) to re-inspect 25% of all the transcribed data, confirming 91 % consistency. This practice comes in agreement with Yilmaz's (2013) call for employing *member checking*, *peer debriefing* and using an *external auditor '*as verification strategies to ensure the accuracy of the account' (p.322-323). Nevertheless, the researchers exhibit minimal reflexivity and demonstrate no acknowledgement of the value-laden nature of their data collection and analysis. They do not comply with BERA's (2000) call for researchers to justify their

chosen research methods in order for their research findings to be deemed credible and reliable.

3.5 Prospects and Implications

The final part of the paper contains the writers' study research and discussion of their findings. The transcripts were scrutinized, and as a result, some of the categories that emerged overlap with categories already identified in the literature. Overall, five categories were formed- teaching context preference/avoidance, teaching context adjustment, attention direction, reappraisal strategies, and reactive strategies. However, the authors do not provide an explanation or justification of their conclusion that 'the emerging categories from the conceptual content analysis were in line, to a great extent, with the model proposed by Gross (1998)'(p. 319). Their contribution to the existing body of knowledge, therefore, is to 'shed more light on the emotional aspect of teaching' (*ibid,* p.319). And whereas this assertion bears some credibility, Akbari *et al.* do not provide us with any further insight into the role of emotions on teacher performance and ways to regulate emotion behavior in the classroom. Similarly, Nisbet (2005) contends that qualitative methods tend to present an overly complex analysis of educational issues without offering any clear-cut solutions. In a similar vein, Woods et al (2018) contend qualitative research mainly attempts to explain only the reason why phenomena occur the way they do. Nevertheless, the research conducted in the interpretivist tradition aims to explain complex social phenomena by deconstructing the interpretations and perceptions

of agents about their social reality, in which the knower and the known are inextricably connected.

In short, the researchers' study agenda remains within the limits of the interpretivist tradition by exploring their participants' views and understanding of emotion regulation behavior. This means that their tacit call for institutional change and implications about implementing the study of emotions in the training programs cannot be sustained based on their findings and the research design they opted for. There is an ostensible mismatch between what they were trying to prove and what claims they made in the paper. The researchers should have been more reflexive and self-aware of their inclinations along the way.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I attempt to critique the theoretical framework and paradigmatic nature of two research designs with a focus on how the writers' values influenced the overall process of collecting information and making knowledge claims. I explore the way the practitioners build their arguments and hypotheses, informed by the available literature. While the first article's author fails to link her findings back to the body of knowledge she consulted, the second article's authors provide some sufficient evidence how their research may be valuable and contributing to the area.

My major argument is that the researcher's ontological assumptions inform her epistemological stance, which in turn gives rise to the choice of methodology and

methods. I posit that researchers' methodological hypotheses are inextricably interwoven within their axiological assumptions. Thus, the adoption of a certain research paradigm is inadvertently informed by the researcher's worldview and beliefs. It can also be suggested that every research methodology is based on a set of assumptions, possibly formed by researchers' underlying beliefs. Working within any research tradition is in fact a manifestation how values influence the overall process of inquiry. I suggest that the researchers of both Paper A and Paper B tacitly demonstrate how their worldviews affect their choice of a research design and forming theoretical and practical implications. While Paper B seems to be more focused and contained in scope by somehow acknowledging the limitations of such a study, Paper A's author could consider what implications she might coin drawing on her data. In both cases, the researchers might benefit from making their assumptions and values more explicit.

In light of the conclusions arrived at earlier, I subscribe to King and Mackey's (2016) call for using a layered approach to educational research, acknowledging the merits and insight of all research traditions and benefiting from the richness and diversity of research methods and methodologies available. The quantitative-qualitative dichotomy is now mostly overcome, and practitioners increasingly opt for mixed-approach paradigms (*ibid*). I believe my analysis of the studies critiqued in this paper sheds light on the importance to be aware of how one's own assumptions delineate the contours of the research design they adopt, and what implications their research findings have on the construction of

policies and establishing practices in the field. The papers discuss how emotions are at the heart of teaching and are omnipresent in teachers' professional practice. The facilitative role of emotions could be incorporated into teacher training syllabi, and policy makers could consider the potential emotional aspect each policy entails. I also think all research traditions can inform a more profound collaboration and engagement with the pending issues to push the boundaries of educational research even further.

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