

THE SUITABILITY OF CRITICAL THEORY AS A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE

Andrew K. Omo-Abu, (Ph.D)

Abstract

This paper discusses the suitability of critical theory research methodology in sociological practice. Given the tremendous task of industrialization and the speed of technological development in both industrialized and the developing countries, social scientists face new challenges that question the suitability of conventional approaches, qualitative and quantitative, research methodology. In addition, the rapid pace of development in the industrialized world has increased pressure on sociological practitioners to maintain their focus on the intended objectives of their projects. Similarly, in considering the infrastructural and technological growth in developing countries, the investigative logic of positivists and interpretivists cannot be relied upon to add to a truly critical social science. Because more needs to be done in this regard, the services of the social scientist remain crucial for this goal.

Introduction

This paper is the first phase of a research program utilizing a critical theory paradigm in the analysis of research results. The critical theory approach to analyzing a phenomenon combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Because of its strength, this approach is richer, more effective, and a more thorough way to analyze phenomena in sociological practice.

What is Critical Theory?

Critical Theory has a narrow and a broad meaning in philosophy and in the history of the social sciences. "Critical Theory" in the narrow sense designates several generations of German philosophers and social theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School. According to these theorists, a "critical" theory may be distinguished from a "traditional" theory according to a specific practical purpose: a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human emancipation, "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Horkheimer 1982). Because such theories aim to explain and transform *all* the circumstances that enslave human beings, many "critical theories" in the broader sense have been developed. They have emerged in connection with the many social movements that identify varied dimensions of the domination of human beings in modern societies. In both the broad and the narrow senses, however, a critical theory provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms.

Critical Theory in the narrow sense has had many different aspects and quite distinct historical phases that cross several generations from the founding of the Institute for Social Research in 1929 to the present. Its distinctiveness as a philosophical approach that extends to ethics, political philosophy, and the philosophy of history is most apparent when considered in light of the history of the philosophy of the social sciences. Critical Theorists have long sought to distinguish their aims, methods, theories, and forms of explanation from standard understandings in both the natural and the social sciences. Instead, they have claimed that social inquiry ought to combine rather than separate the poles of philosophy and the social sciences: explanation and understanding, structure and agency, regularity and normativity. Such an approach, Critical Theorists argue, permits their enterprise to be *practical* in a distinctively moral (rather than instrumental) sense. They do not merely seek to provide the means to achieve some independent goal, but rather (as in Horkheimer's famous definition mentioned above) seek "human emancipation" in circumstances of domination and oppression. This normative task cannot be accomplished apart from the interplay between philosophy and social science through interdisciplinary empirical social research (Horkheimer 1993).

While Critical Theory is often thought of narrowly as referring to the Frankfurt School that begins with Horkheimer and Adorno and stretches to Marcuse and Habermas, any philosophical

approach with similar practical aims could be called a "critical theory," including feminism, critical race theory, and some forms of post-colonial criticism. It follows from Horkheimer's definition that a critical theory is adequate only if it meets three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. That is, it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation. Any truly critical theory of society, as Horkheimer further defined it in his writings as Director of the Frankfurt School's Institute for Social Research, "has as its object human beings as producers of their own historical form of life" (Horkheimer 1993,). In light of the practical goal of identifying and overcoming all the circumstances that limit human freedom, the explanatory goal could be furthered only through interdisciplinary research that includes psychological, cultural, and social dimensions, as well as institutional forms of domination. Given the emphasis among the first generation of Critical Theory on human beings as the self-creating producers of their own history, a unique practical aim of social inquiry suggests itself: to transform contemporary capitalism into a consensual form of social life. For Horkheimer, a capitalist society could be transformed only by becoming more democratic, to make it such that "all conditions of social life that are controllable by human beings depend on real consensus" in a rational society (Horkheimer 1982). The normative orientation of Critical Theory, at least in its form of critical social inquiry, is therefore, towards the transformation of capitalism into a "real democracy" in which such control could be exercised (Horkheimer 1982). In such formulations, there are striking similarities between Critical Theory and American pragmatism.

A social scientist is a social critic who studies society and its problems. It is not enough to study any social phenomenon, issue a report of findings, and leave it to collect dusts in a library or in an archive. For a study to be meaningful, the researcher has to test his recommendations and improve upon them where and when necessary. The critical theory approach to research involves the researcher in all the processes of a study: collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data; recommending solutions to problems determined from the investigation; pilot-testing the recommendations; and improving on the outcome of the recommendations or withdrawing the suggested solutions to a problem if, after testing, they are proved wrong. At this juncture, the study would need to start all over again (Bredo and Feinberg, 1982).

The unique quality of this approach makes it one of the most effective approaches that can be utilized by sociological practitioners in studying and investigating matters in both developed and developing countries. According to Miles et al, (1984), the critical theory approach to human inquiry is the only methodology that combines the quantitative elements of positivism and the hermeneutics of interpretivism.

Akiwowo, (in Genov, 1989), defined intellectual tradition as those beliefs, assumptions and practices which are passed verbally or in writing from one generation of scholars to another. This tradition, focused on human nature and the nature of human society, ensures the continuity of a particular body of knowledge and a mode of seeing the world shared by members of a specific school of thought. In their specialized positions as social critics, social scientists have the responsibility to recommend solutions to their retainers and to follow up on how their recommendations are being applied to the social problems they initially investigated. With such understanding and insight, most social scientists would find it difficult to remain aloof to the society whose problems they have probed. Rather, they would obtain equitable resolutions for such problems; and in doing so they must be involved passionately yet objectively. They must demonstrate humane interest in their subject and apply either deductive or inductive methods as they suit their goals. They must be flexible and able to interpret their findings rationally. Critical theory research methodology possesses the characteristics that successfully draw the researcher into that dimension of involvement (Bredo et al, 1982).

Why Critical Approach?

Critical theory involves the researchers to the extent that they are required to monitor the application of their recommendations to minimize the possibility of error. The responsibility of the critical theorist is not static, but evolving. It requires a display of objectivity, professionalism and honest purpose to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge.

According to Smith and Heshusius (1986), educational researchers have recently devoted much time and energy to debating one method over another. They suggest the tendency for social scientists to engage in controversial discussions rather than in meaningful, educative and insightful contributions to knowledge. They observe their slant toward viewing approaches as if not interchangeable, then certainly as complementary to each other. This implies that researchers may invariably combine any number of approaches for any given research situation, or else use one at a time, depending on the nature of circumstances under investigation (Firestone, 1987).

These personal tendencies pose problems or challenges for anyone desiring a clear understanding of a particular issue. Controversial arguments normally do not illuminate either systematically or comparatively, the various points of contention or differences that exist among methods. Similarly, the assumption that the three approaches, critical theory, positivism and interpreted sm, are little more than alternative methodologies, should not be accepted at face value if the issue is to be intelligence: their utilization does not respond to applicability alone, to the exclusion of epistemological considerations (Bredo et al., 1982).

The following sections present brief definitions and discussions of each of the three methodologies, the first two are

conventional approaches:

- (a) Positivist or Quantitative;
- (b) Interpretivist or Qualitative; and,
- (c) Critical Theory research methods.

The main objective of this section is comparative. Thereafter, a case for the relevance of critical theory to human inquiry and educational research in sociological practice in both industrialized and developing countries is offered. The subsequent analysis of selected issues pertaining to socio-economically disadvantaged countries will demonstrate the benefits of critical theory research methodology.

The Three Approaches

Positivist or Quantitative Theory Approach

According to Bredo and Feinberg, (1982) the term "positivism" was coined in the last century by the French philosopher-sociologist, Auguste Comte, as a way of referring to his "positive" philosophy. This philosophy represented a particular understanding of the nature and growth of knowledge in the natural sciences and the application of Comte's understanding to issues of social progress. Bredo and Feinberg (1982) defined positivism as a theory of knowledge that implicitly regards technical interest as constitutive of all knowledge. Thus, it claims that the technical cognitive interest is the only legitimate, cognitive interest.

They also, contend that the science of researching represents an evolutionary advance over previous myth or metaphysical systems. They explained that, scientific knowledge is grounded in sensory experience, which, at its simplest, was considered indubitable. These facts, they argued, could be related to and explained by general laws integrated into coherent theoretical systems, such that, as science progressed, more and more facts could be explained by fewer or more general laws. Further, Bredo and Feinberg (1982), explained that scientific knowledge was open to rational modification, and could develop in a way that these prior systems would not because of its empirical testability.

The positivist approach assumes a strict subject-object dichotomy in which the knower is not involved with the known. From a positivist perspective, valid knowledge is consistent with this detached point of view. The known person or collectivity is treated as a system to be studied by noting the relations between disorders in the state of one of its elements and changes in the states of its other elements. By observing this association between changed states, the researcher can infer the laws by which the system operates. Thus, this methodology is deemed suitable as a sole research tool in sociological practice. According to Akiwowo (1989), the strength of positivism lies in the skillful use of a logical reasoning sequence, and in abstraction as a means of knowing reality. This, he argued, denies the other powers of the mind such as intuition, feeling, and physical sensation. It places sole emphasis on thinking and other powers of the mind as tools of knowing. In addition, there is no difference between studying social phenomena and natural phenomena. The interpretive method discussed in the following section has a contrary approach to the positivist research approach.

Interpretive or Qualitative Theory Approach

Interpretivism is a theory of knowledge that implicitly regards practical interest as fundamental to all knowledge. In this regard, technical knowledge is ultimately based on a shared culture and form of life (Taylor, 1982). The interpretive approach is aimed at openness to conceptions and to an understanding of subjects - - groups or people being studied. This concept of research, according to the interpretivists, is that the correct usage of research findings depends very much upon the subjects being studied. The Interpretivist approach views the knower and the known as more closely involved with one another. Interpretivists hold that one learns about another's character or culture through the consistency of their cultural patterns over one's own. In this approach, the knower and the known are necessarily involved with one another since one must use oneself to understand others (Bredo and Feinberg, 1982).

The qualitative method of inquiry is seen as free from predetermined theories and questions, with these only emerging after data collection rather than being posed before the study begins. This method of qualitative research involves participant observation. Jacob (1988) argued that qualitative research was not one approach. She claimed that, qualitative research in non-education disciplines assumes many varieties, which can be more clearly identified and understood by using the notion of tradition.

In support of this argument, Kuhn (1970) explained that various scholars within the sciences agreed among themselves on the nature of the universe they examined. They agreed on which legitimate questions and problems needed to be studied, and on which legitimate techniques would seek solutions. Kuhn stated that, such groups have a tradition, which occurs either as an entire discipline or as a school within a discipline. This paper does not intend to discuss these traditions more than necessary, but only to list and briefly discuss them to facilitate the main theme under consideration. The six traditions from the disciplines of anthropology, psychology, and sociology are: human ethology, ecological psychology, holistic anthropology, cognitive anthropology, anthropology of communication, and symbolic interactionism.

Kuhn (1970) argued that although scholars in all of the traditions acknowledge that there is subjective dimension to

human behavior, they do not agree on the definition of subjective dimension and the role they give it in their work. The traditions also stress that descriptive studies should precede studies that test specific theories. According to Taylor (1982), the purpose of this descriptive phase is to discover what is happening in the natural setting, and in some cases to understand the meanings of the participants. All traditions allow for the possibility of conducting studies focused on testing specific hypotheses once the necessary descriptive groundwork has been laid. Researchers and adherents of these traditions emphasize the importance of description and avoiding preconceived ideas. They hold assumptions, which guide the developments of their descriptive questions. In each of the traditions, these assumptions are related to what scholars (practitioners of the traditions) think should be the focus of the study.

The six traditions selected for analysis, according to Kuhn (1970), take different approaches to what is subjective. In their studies of human behavior settings, ecological psychologists and human ethologists pay little attention to subjectivity. The traditions that acknowledge the importance of the subjective in human life do so in diverse ways. In their specimen studies, ecological psychologists define the subjective in terms of individual goals and emotional reactions to their environment, while the three anthropological traditions define the subjective as culture. Symbolic interactionists define the subjective in terms of symbolic interaction processes and what individuals do with socially derived meanings.

Participant observation plays various roles in all the traditions listed and analyzed above. Human ethologists or ecological psychologists for collecting specimen records or describing human settings do not use it. Ecological psychologists to identify behavior settings however, sometimes use it. In the following sections, I will discuss critical theory approach to elicit its strength as more effective, which makes it a better approach in sociological practice.

Critical Theory Approach

Critical theory, a relatively new approach to generalizing and research methodology, attempts to evaluate and synthesize the contributions made to social knowledge by both positivist and interpretive researchers. The critical theory approach to generalizing enables the researcher to own a broad view and to assess the limitations and possibilities of the positivist and interpretive methods (Taylor, 1982). Critical theorists transcend the dichotomies implicit in the interpretive and positivist methods by appealing to a broader context. Proponents of the critical theory to research methodology view knowledge in the context of its constitution and potential contribution to social evolution, whereas social knowledge is conceived of as the opportunity to develop progressive material and symbolic emancipation (Habermas 1982,).

Critical theory takes the emancipating interest as fundamental to its knowledge while it recognizes other types of knowledge-seeking tools; it also attempts to show that such tools have their basis in human undertakings. Thus, the theory could be considered pluralistic since it permits a legitimate role for each of the two types of knowledge-seeking tools in its own scheme. Critical theory suggests that knowledge must be seen in terms of its implications for progressive social change. By viewing knowledge with a social evolutionary perspective, the critical theorist creates a hierarchy of contexts and kinds of knowledge, beginning with the narrowest individual context. Understanding these contexts and their interrelationships means understanding the nature of social knowledge.

Habermas (1982), viewed social evolution as depending upon two principal ways in which humans shape the world themselves: through labor or instrumental action and through symbolic or communicative action. He argued that people attempt to satisfy their material wants by acting upon and shaping the material world through instrumental actions. They reach agreement on norms between one another, which complies with these norms through communicative actions. The institutional rules that results from communicative actions provide the context within which instrumental actions take place.

According to Bredo and Feinberg (1982), the critical theory approach emphasizes mediation between positivistic and interpretive approaches. The idea is to find a research methodology that avoids both the implicit absolutism of positivism and the implicit relativism of interpretivism, a methodology open to questioning its own categorical distinctions, but not open at both ends. It attempts to synthesize all major research approaches because the positivist and interpretive approaches view knowledge with a long-term social evolutionary perspective that allows for critical reflection on the adequacy of current paradigms or approaches.

In the critical theory approach, the knower and the known are even more mutually involved, although both may fail to recognize this. In this perspective, the knowledge generated is part of a process of mutual growth for both parties. The researcher is an agent of change or a reinforcer of the status quo. The reason for this development is that the very conceptual and methodological framework within which the research is conducted allows for critical questioning for the observed knowledge while other matters beyond observation are placed outside the bounds of legitimate discourse. The researcher, therefore, serves to eliminate dispute about certain kinds of questions or policies and legitimize others. Critically oriented research focuses on the contradistinction between the formal and the substantive, and between the meaning and explanation of this disjunction.

Critically oriented research suggests that, the problem is neither with the formal nor the informal, but rather with power relations and self-interest that maintains such divergence beyond what is technically or socially necessary. According to Habermas (1982), the function of critical social science is to increase the awareness hidden away from social actors of

the contradictory conditions of actions which are distorted or not crystal-clear through everyday understanding. This is evident in one of the most comprehensive radical critiques of the America's education system, *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Bowles and Gintis (1977) addressed the functions of American schools with the perspective of political economists while functionalists, like Randall Collins, assumed a social scientist approach.

In their approach, Bowles and Gintis (1982) delineated the sociological impact of education on economics. They successfully opened to a different page in the catalog of educational functions in American culture in order to appreciate the numerous intended values of education and schooling as well as the apparent failure to implement them because of faulty administration. Courageously, they analyzed the failures of both the American educational and economic systems in achieving the national objective of equal opportunity, national integration of diverse ethnic representation, and the development of the creative potential of American youth. They argued that American schools are repressive, unequal and contradictory in their objectives of contemporary education and social order. They advocated for a new economic order, socialist democracy, which would eliminate class rules and material dependency by extending democracy to the governance of economic affairs, ranging from the production unit level to national economic policy and planning. In this way, they claimed, the national objective of equal opportunity can be accomplished through the educational system as well as through free market enterprises; and this objective would be manifested in its tripartite dimension: fostering social equality, promoting the development of creative potential in youth, and integrating a new generation into the social order. Bowles and Gintis contended that, school is an instrument to promote economic inequality and positive human development. They argued that while the general level of education has dramatically increased in the U.S. since the World War I, and while there has been considerable equalization of educational distribution among individuals, yet economic mobility: — the degree to which economic success (income or occupational status) is independent of an individual's family background has not changed appreciatively.

Bowles and Gintis further stated that, the American schools create and reinforce patterns of social class, race and sexual identification among students, allowing them to relate properly to their future positions in the hierarchy of authority and their status in the production process. Schools enhance the kind of personal development that is compatible with the dominant and subordinate relationship existing in the economic sphere. They concluded that schools create a surplus of skilled labor that is sufficiently extensive to emphasize the prime weapon of the employer in disciplining labor — the power to hire and fire.

From the above analysis, it is clear that Bowles and Gintis did not contest the socialization functions of education, which are the prime concerns of the functionalists in their analysis-of educational functions. The significant difference in the various positions, however, is that the functionalist views education as a means of creating the individual who will participate actively in the cultural and socioeconomic development of society. Bowles and Gintis thought that, the American educational system created master/slavery relationships among the members of society. They blamed this expanding social inequality on the economic system and recommended an alternative solution, which they believed, would lead to social equality and liberation only when it prepares youths for fully democratic participation.

Bowles and Gintis did not fully accept Durkheim's (1938), concept of "collective complementarity." In *Division of Labor*, Durkheim argued that "collective complementarity" results from the development of individuals according to their ability, which in turn affect results in the division of labor — everyone contributes according to his ability and specialization to the common goal of the society, and is rewarded in equal terms. Critical theorists assume the role of a critic of the social order, including educational practices that reproduce inequalities based on race, gender, and class. In fulfilling this function, Bowles and Gintis (1982) observed that deep structural changes in schools and society are needed to move toward a more democratic form of social life. Echoing this observation, Soltis (1990), in his contribution to the *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, stated that educational research should serve moral, not just technical purposes.

Method of Explanation

Gouldner (1982) explained that, unlike positivists and interpretivists, critical theorists do not accommodate either external causal explanations or internal reason explanations. Critical theorists see these two types of explanations as dialectically interrelated, with their interplay serving to provide grounds for a third type of explanation. This third type of explanation ~ explanatory understanding-combines elements of the other two types of explanation. Critical theorists attempt to explain systematic distortion in communication, both on an individual and social level. Although these systematic distortions are not in as much interpreted facts, critical theory seeks to account for them. Critical theory is concerned with the over-extension of concepts and procedures at one level to different levels.

Approaching social-relational problems as merely technical problems is one type of distortion. Distortion mistakes the part for the whole. It takes a limited domain of knowledge and, without recognizing the context in which this knowledge fits, considers it to be the entire body. When the part is mistaken for the whole, the approach fails to recognize its own partiality. Gouldner (1982)

further argued that, partiality in learning and communication occurs because ideologies mobilize those whose interests would be served by the programs that the ideologies legitimize, in large part, this happens because people's sentiments tend to be

consistent with their interests. Those sentimentally attracted to ideology, according to Gouidner (1982), are those whose interests are served by the ideology. He further argued that, some people might be attracted to an ideology just because they are disenchanted with the current social reality opposed by the ideology, and not because they accept the ideology's implicit program. Critical theory attempts to explain communicative distortion in terms of a history of events in which people's interests are involved. It recognizes that this historical context gives meaning to present communicative distortions and can be used to reveal the partial interests behind current ideologies, lu the foregoing explanation, the aim of the critical theorist is to participate in reversing this process so that the cause becomes the reason, and thus, the problematic situation can be dealt with more rationally and collectively. The following section now will present what critics have said about the critical theory research methodology. This discussion will serve to show that critical theory research methodology has yet not been accepted as the panacea for all research problems.

Criticism of Critical Theory Methodology

Some scholars have criticized the critical theory approach in broad perspectives, as follows:

- (a) The categorical nature of cognitive interests and, therefore, the different types of sciences;
- (b) The "quasi-transcendental" status of these interests; and,
- (c) The practical politics implied by critical theory (Bredo and Gintis, 1982).

One of the foremost critics of critical theory is Bernstein (1982), who argued that there is no categorically distinctive object-domain type of experience and corresponding forms of inquiry, but this is only continuity. He supported his criticism by arguing that recent philosophy and the history of science tend to show close relationship in the fundamental disputes occurring in both natural and social sciences. He drew attention, to the parallel between Kuhn's views on theory-governed observation in the natural sciences and Taylor's views on inter-subjective meaning and constituted practice in the social sciences. He concluded that, this interpretation is vital in different types of sciences, and stressed the need for critical self-reflection in the sciences. One other criticism was that the status of cognitive interests is ambiguous. This suggests that the very foundation of critical theory is unclear. Gouidner (1982) argued that it is uncertain whether the legitimizing grounds of critical theory are to be found in the natural history of social evolution or in an internal reflection on the categorical nature of different types of knowledge. He further suggested that, the practical political implications of critical theory are absent or confused. In Gouldner's view, critical theory emphasizes communicative freedom and, in effect, concentrates on the kinds of communicative distortions that arise from market forces and the influence of large corporations in restricting access to topics of legitimate communication.

Other Terms for Critical Theory

The term "critical theory", as a research methodology is a general term that explains or describes various approaches to research employed by some social scientists. In using different terms, other researchers emphasized different aspects of the overall process. Those who work within a development context, most especially in developing countries, use the term, "participatory research" (Obikeze & Mere, 1985). Participatory research emphasizes establishing a dialogue between research workers and grass roots people with whom they work, in order to discover and realize the practical and cultural needs of those people. Obikeze and his colleagues at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in a follow-up study of the Rehabilitation Program for War-Displaced Children in Nigeria, tested the participatory research approach. Obikeze stated that the research problems, which his team had earlier encountered, were overcome when they tried the participatory research method. Their research thus became part of a developmental process including education and political action.

According to Reason (1988), the term, "collaborative inquiry"¹ and "action science" emerged from the tradition of critical inquiry. He explained that, many of the fundamental ideas of the critical theory tradition were developed by Torbert (1983), whose concern was to establish an action science useful lo the practitioner at the moment of action, rather than science reflective about action. This concern, he stated, has led practitioners in this mode to be concerned about ways of learning from experience, and especially giving it high quality attention, which is needed if this kind of inquiry is to succeed. lutcovich's (1993), empowerment model has all the characteristics of the critical theory research methodology. In "Assessing the needs of rural elderly: An empowerment model," lutcovich (1993), described how she employed the services of the community leaders in a rural Pennsylvania county to conduct a need assessment evaluation. In the project, according to lutcovich, the researcher as technical expert functioned as a consultant who provided training and supervised the project, while the community leaders who are the stakeholders of the communal needs served in different positions of the research team. Membership of the research team identified the need, developed the modality of the survey and carried out the survey, which consisted of oral interviewing and mailing. Although, the researcher provided an expert knowledge in designing the questionnaires, trained and provided answers to delicate sociological questions, she also became a stakeholder in the welfare of the county. By the end of the project, the county leadership had acquired good knowledge of how to conduct an assessment need and could predict the findings of the evaluation before the report was compiled and submitted.

Conclusion

The best way to show how Critical Theory offers a distinctive philosophical approach is to locate it historically in German Idealism and its aftermath. For Marx and his generation, Hegel was the last in the grand tradition of philosophical thought able to give us secure knowledge of humanity and history on its own. The issue for Left Hegelians and Marx was then somehow to overcome Hegelian "theoretical" philosophy, and Marx argues that it can do so only by making philosophy "practical," in the sense of changing practices by which societies realize their ideals. Once reason was thoroughly socialized and made historical, historicist skepticism emerged at the same time, attempting \ to relativize philosophical claims about norms and reason to historically and culturally variable forms of life. Critical Theory developed a nonskeptical version of this conception, linking philosophy closely to the human and social sciences. In so doing, it can link empirical and interpretive social science to normative claims of truth, morality and justice, traditionally the purview of philosophy. While it defends the emphasis on normatively and universalist ambitions found in the philosophical tradition, it does so within the context of particular sorts of empirical social research, with which it has to cooperate if it is to understand such normative claims within the current historical context.

As opposed to merely debunking criticism, "a critical theory is concerned with preventing the loss of truth that past knowledge has labored to attain." Given Critical Theory's orientation to human emancipation, it seeks to contextualize philosophical claims to truth and moral universality without reducing them to social and historical conditions. Horkheimer, formulates this skeptical fallacy that informed much of the sociologically informed relativism of his time in this way: "That all our thoughts, true or false, depend on conditions that can change in no way affects the validity of science. It is not clear why the conditioned character of thought should affect the truth of a judgment—why shouldn't insight be just as conditioned as error?" (Horkheimer 1993). Faced with a sociological naturalism that relativized claims to truth and justice are necessary for social criticism, the challenge could be answered by detranscendentalizing truth without losing its normativity (Horkheimer 1993, McCarthy, in McCarthy and Hoy 1994).

Each of the research frameworks, discussed in this paper, is useful and valid in its own way, depending on the type of inquiry, the researcher, the setting, and the level of development of the country under inquiry. However, this paper has focused on the critical theory research methodology stressing that because of its unique attributes of involving all the actors in the research process, it clearly encompasses the qualities of the other two traditional methods discussed herein. The two conventional traditions, which Mazrui (1978), described as Western mode of scientific inquiry; require that an individual who wishes to be scholarly and scientific must also be intellectually detached and socially disengaged. Mazrui asserted that, these two qualities alienate sociologists from the society about which they seek reliable knowledge. He posited, that the critical theory methodology has the capability to indigenize, thereby reducing the foreignness of imported ideas, concepts, theories and methodology. Although each approach claims superiority of method and purpose, they can also each help us, expert researchers and budding researchers, to understand and expand knowledge in the domains of education and social phenomena, specifically addressing the technological, economic, interpersonal and the socio-political aspects of phenomena under investigation.

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