

Interview as a Tool for Data Collection

Introduction

An interview in research is a purposeful, guided conversation designed to obtain in-depth information from participants. Unlike casual conversation, interviews are directed toward specific research goals. They enable researchers to explore participants' experiences, opinions, and knowledge directly, providing a richness that other methods, such as questionnaires, may lack (Kvale, 1996; Sahoo, 2022).

Interviews serve multiple purposes in educational and social research. They are used to explore complex processes, describe behaviors and experiences, and validate findings from other methods like observation or surveys. According to Tuckman (1972), interviews help researchers access what is "inside a person's head," uncovering values, attitudes, and thoughts that cannot easily be observed externally (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

1-. Characteristics of a Good Interview

A good research interview is purposeful and interactive. It allows flexibility so the interviewer can ask follow-up questions, while also remaining sensitive to the participant's feelings and comfort. Effective interviews create an environment of trust, where knowledge is co-constructed between interviewer and interviewee, as emphasized by Laing (1967). Flexibility and active listening are key elements in making the participant feel heard and respected.

2. Types of Interviews

2.1 Structured Interview

In a structured interview, the researcher asks all participants exactly the same questions in the same order, using standardized wording. This type of interview is similar to a verbal

questionnaire. It allows for easy comparison between respondents and supports quantitative analysis. Structured interviews are most appropriate when the researcher needs to collect factual, straightforward information from a large number of participants and minimize interviewer bias (Sahoo, 2022; Cohen et al., 2018).

2.2 Semi-Structured Interview

A semi-structured interview uses a set of prepared guiding questions but allows flexibility in how the conversation unfolds. While the main topics are covered for every participant, the researcher can ask follow-up or probing questions based on participants' responses. This type is ideal when researchers seek both consistency across interviews and the opportunity to explore individual experiences in more depth. It is widely used in educational and social sciences research for its balance between structure and openness (Sahoo, 2022).

2.3 Unstructured Interview

Unstructured interviews are informal and conversational. There is no strict list of questions, although the researcher may have some broad topics in mind. This type of interview allows participants to lead the discussion and reveal what they see as important. Unstructured interviews are especially useful in exploratory research where little is known about the topic or when studying sensitive issues. However, because each interview is different, comparing responses can be challenging (Cohen et al., 2018).

2.4 Telephone Interview

Telephone interviews are conducted over the phone, allowing researchers to reach participants who are geographically distant. They save time and travel costs but limit the ability to observe body language and build rapport. The structure can be either structured, semi-structured, or even informal, depending on the study's needs (Sahoo, 2022).

2.5 Online Interview

With advances in technology, online interviews have become increasingly popular, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Conducted via platforms like Zoom, Skype, or Teams, online interviews offer flexibility and accessibility. However, technical issues and the lack of in-person interaction may affect communication quality. Online interviews can be structured or semi-structured (Sahoo, 2022).

2.6 Focus Group Interview

Focus group interviews involve interviewing multiple participants at the same time, encouraging them to interact and discuss the topics together. A facilitator guides the conversation while participants respond not only to the interviewer but also to each other. Focus groups are effective for exploring shared experiences, generating ideas, and observing group dynamics, but managing dominant speakers and ensuring everyone participates can be challenging (Sahoo, 2022; Cohen et al., 2018).

3-Strengths and Limitations

Interviews offer several strengths. They provide rich, detailed information and allow researchers to explore complex, nuanced topics. The face-to-face nature often encourages trust and openness. However, interviews can also be time-consuming, costly, and subject to interviewer bias. Maintaining confidentiality and minimizing social desirability bias can also be challenging (Sahoo, 2022; Kvale, 1996).

4. Planning an Interview-Based Study

Kvale (1996) proposes a seven-stage process for conducting interviews. First, researchers must **thematize** the purpose of the interview and design questions accordingly. During **interviewing**, it is important to build rapport and probe thoughtfully. Once interviews are completed, researchers must **transcribe** recordings into text for analysis. Then, they move to **analyze**, **verify** the findings' reliability, and **report** the results. Careful planning at each stage enhances the credibility and depth of the data collected.

5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are central in interview-based research. Researchers must obtain informed consent, protect participants' confidentiality, and ensure that the questions and interview process do not cause harm. Participants should always be fully aware of the research purpose and their right to withdraw at any time (Cohen et al., 2018).

6-Sample Interview Layout

A typical semi-structured interview layout might start with an introduction where the researcher explains the study's purpose. Then, a few warm-up questions help relax the participant. This is followed by core questions aligned with the research themes, with probing questions added as needed. Finally, the interview closes with an opportunity for the participant to add any final comments and with words of thanks.

Conclusion

Interviews are powerful tools for collecting rich, qualitative data that capture the human side of research. They allow for deep exploration of participants' inner experiences, but they require thoughtful planning, ethical sensitivity, and strong communication skills. By carefully designing and conducting interviews, researchers can gain insights that are both profound and meaningful for their studies.

References

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