Interview as a Tool for Data Collection in Educational Research

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Abstract:

Research tools play a most significant role in carrying out research. It helps researchers in the gathering of data with which they are able to test the hypotheses or answer the research questions. There are numerous tools for data collection in educational research, and each tool employs distinctive ways of describing and quantifying the data. One of the widely employed tools for data collection is the interview. It is a purposeful interaction in which one person obtains information from one or more individuals. It is essentially the oral, in-person administration of a questionnaire to each member of the sample. There are many situations in which an interview is the most appropriate as it allows for greater depth of information which is not possible by any other means. In the light of the above, this paper aims to familiarize the researcher with the interview as a data-gathering technique and attempt to develop skills in their use and sensitivity to their effectiveness in specific situations. The intention is also to enable the researchers to choose the most suitable case in which to use

interviews as an instrument for data collection. Furthermore, certain key ideas such as the role of interview along with its various types; guidelines that a researcher should follow while conducting an interview; reliability and validity of an interview; and some of the strengths and limitations of the interview as a data-gathering technique are also set out, so that decisions on their suitability do not become arbitrary and the criterion of fitness for purpose is held high.

Keywords: Structured Interview; Unstructured Interview; Semi-structured Interview; Personal and Group Interview; Telephone Interview; Online Interview; Reliability and Validity

Introduction

One of the widely employed methods of data collection is the interview. It is a purposeful interaction in which one person obtains information from one or more individuals. It is an art which is practiced in many situations with varying degrees of satisfaction to the interviewer and interviewee. Many people representing many different professions conduct interviews. Some people, because of the nature of their work spend a substantial part of their time in interviewing such as lawyers, counsellors, doctors, journalists, etc. You must have also witnessed many programmes on TV, which are basically interview-based. These programs usually invite celebrities, film personalities, politicians, industrialists, etc. to get information on their life, works or they may be asked questions pertaining to some social theme or current political event. But can all interactions between two or more than two people be termed as interviews? When two friends are talking to each other, is it an interview? When a father and son are conversing with each other, is it an interview? No, it is not. You have to distinguish between mere conversation and an interview. Not all the talks that take place between two or more than two people can be termed as an interview. An interview is not a mere conversation but a purposeful, directed conversation. The crucial characteristic which distinguishes an interview from a conversation is that interview interaction is designed to achieve a conscious purpose. If the interaction has no purpose, it may be a conversation, but it may not be termed as an interview.

In social science, interviews are a method of data collection that involves two or more people exchanging information through a series of questions and answers. It is essentially the oral, in-person administration of a questionnaire to each member of the sample. In this process, the interviewer can observe certain aspects of a person's behavior, such as his manner of speaking, poise, tendency, etc. (Sahoo, 2021). The questions may be pre-decided. Invariably it is seen that for data collection, the interview method includes only open-ended questions. The questions are designed by a researcher to elicit information from interview participants on a specific topic or set of topics. These topics are informed by the author's research questions.

Now, you may be wondering when you should choose interviews as your data collection method. Interviews are an excellent way to gather detailed information. Interviews are also useful when your topic is rather complex, requires a lengthy explanation, or needs a dialogue between two people to investigate thoroughly. Additionally, interviews may be the best method to utilize if your study involves describing the process by which a phenomenon occurs, like how a person makes a decision. For example, you could use interviews to gather data about how people reach the decision not to have children and how others in their lives have responded to that decision. To understand these processes, you would need to exchange dialogue with respondents. When they begin to share their story with you, new questions that hadn't occurred to you in prior interviews will arise because each person's story is unique. Further, closed-ended questions would not be as effective in capturing the complex process of choosing not to have children.

Let us discuss some of the definitions to know the meaning of this term.

According to Monette et al., "an interview involves an interviewer reading questions to respondents and recording their answers."

According to W. J. Goode & P.K. Hatt, "interviewing is fundamentally a process of social interaction."

According to Burns, "an interview is a verbal interchange, often face to face, though the telephone may be used, in which an interviewer tries to elicit information, beliefs or opinions from another person."

According to Kvale, "an interview is interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production."

Krishan Kumar (1992) defines "interviewing is a process of personal interaction between a researcher and a respondent."

Ranjit Kumar, in his book **Research Methodology (1999),** opined that "any person-to-person interaction between two or more individuals with a specific purpose in mind is called interview."

O' Leary (2004) of the view that "Interviewing a method of data collection which involves researchers asking respondents basically open-ended questions."

The research interview has been defined as a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation.

On the basis of the above discussion, the characteristics of the interview may be written as:

- A purposeful interaction in which one person obtains information from one or more individuals.
- It is a verbal interchange, often face to face, though the telephone may be used, in which an interviewer tries to elicit information, beliefs, or opinions from another person.
- It is an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production.
- It is a process where the interviewer can observe certain aspects of a person's behaviour, such as his manner of speaking, his poise, his tendency, etc.
- It involves a series of questions and answers.
- It includes questions that a researcher designs to elicit information from interview participants on a specific topic or set of topics.
- It is not a mere conversation but a purposeful, directed conversation.
- It is more useful when the research topic is rather complex, requires a lengthy explanation, or needs a dialogue.
- It helps the investigator to gain an impression of the person concerned.
- It can deal with delicate, confidential, and even intimate topics.

Types of Interviews

There are basically three main kinds of interviews: the structured interview, the unstructured interview, and the semi-structured interview.

Structured Interview: A structured interview, sometimes called a standardized interview, entails the administration of an interview schedule by an interviewer. In a structured interview, the interviewer asks a predetermined set of questions, using the

exact wording and order of questions as specified in the interview schedule. This means that each respondent receives precisely the same interview stimulus as any other. In many structured interviews, not only the questions, but also the probable responses, are predetermined. It's critical to have pre-coded replies so that all responders can be compared. The goal of this style of interviewing is to ensure that interviewees' replies can be aggregated, and this can be achieved reliably only if those replies are in response to identical cues. Interviewers are supposed to read out questions exactly and in the same order as they are printed on the schedule. The intention of the structured interview is also for the interviewing of respondents to be standardized so that differences between interviews in any research project are minimized. Hence, while conducting a structured interview, it is critical that the interviewer strictly adheres to the interview instructions, which are as follows:

- Only interview those subjects who meet the sample criteria.
- Maintain proper order and filtering throughout the questionnaire.
- Keep personal ideas to oneself.
- Where necessary, readout pre-codes and prompts.
- For questions demanding spontaneous responses, do not read out pre-codes.
- Completely write down open-ended replies.

In addition to the above, there are certain strengths and limitations of structured interviews, which are as follows:

Strengths:

- It is easy to conduct.
- In this type of interview, desired data can be collected without omitting anything.
- It provides uniform information, which assures the comparability of data.

- It requires fewer interviewing skills than does unstructured interviewing because of listed questions.
- It provides an opportunity to interviewer to remain unbiased.

Limitations:

- It follows a rigid procedure, as the interviewer asks only the pre-drafted questions.
- No freedom is given to the interviewer, as they cannot change the questions or their sequence.

Example (Model Questions)

1. Do you make use of ICT in your class?

   Yes ....

   No ....

2. Are you aware of the concept of artificial intelligence?

   Yes ....

   No ....

3. Do you communicate with students in their mother tongue?
   Yes ....

   No ....

4. Do you have anything more to add?.............................
………………………………………………….........................
....

Unstructured Interview: Unstructured interview is also called an in-depth interview. It is also said that this type of interview is best suited to those situations where very little is known. Such interviews aim to elicit information from the respondents which otherwise may not be procured. Kothari (2004) opined, "depth interviews are designed to discover underlying motives and desires

and are often used in motivational research. Such interviews are held to explore the needs, desires and feelings of the respondents." In this type of interview, the questioning is situational. The interviewer is free to develop the conversation along the lines that seems most suitable to them. They may choose questions depending upon the situation and the topic about which the data are required. The interviewer is free to decide the form and timing of the questions. There is no set typed questions. One question leads to another and so on. The main aim of the interviewer is to get the personal viewpoint of the respondents on a given topic. Therefore, in carrying out an unstructured interview, it is very much important that the interviewer should keep the interview guide/schedule with him/her at the time of the interview. It helps him/her know the areas to be covered and provides guidelines for smooth conduct of interview sessions. There are also certain strengths and limitations of unstructured interviews which are as follows:

Strengths:

- It enables extended data collection from subjects.
- It provides complete freedom to the interviewer in terms of content and structure.
- It has flexibility and there is no set typed questions.
- It can make cross-questioning possible.
- It provides freedom to the interviewer to formulate questions and raise issues on the spur of the moment, depending upon the context of the discussion.
- It provides the personal viewpoint of the respondents on a given topic.
- As it allows people to 'speak for themselves,' the data's validity is increased.
- It provides complete autonomy to the interviewer in asking questions whatever comes to their mind on a particular research problem under investigation.

- The flexibility of unstructured interviews helps in generating spontaneous, useful responses in the area of research.

Limitations:

- It is costly in time, both for subjects and researchers.
- The interviewer can be biased.
- It may be ineffective since subjects may not limit themselves to the research topic of interest.
- It is challenging to analyse the result of an unstructured interview, as it resulted least uniform answer.
- It requires sufficient knowledge background, good interviewing skills, command of language, and ability to convince the respondent to answer.
- It demands specialised training to be imparted to the interviewer/researcher to get the best results.

Example (Model Questions)

1. What are some of the changes you are making when you use ICT tools in the classroom?…….................................……
…………………………………………………………………

2. How are strategies changing with regard to ICT in the classroom?……...……
…………………………………………..................................

3. Do you think there is a need for change in classroom dynamics and traditional time structures?

        Yes ....

        No ....

If yes, give reasons.……...…
…………………………………………………………………

If no, give reasons.….. ......…
…………………………………………………………………

Semi-structured Interview: It usually refers to a situation in which the interviewer has a set of questions in the basic form of an interview schedule but can change or modify the order of the questions. The questions are generally more wide in scope than those found in a structured interview schedule. Additionally, in this type of interview, the interviewer is typically given considerable leeway to ask follow-up questions in response to noteworthy responses. So, in short, we can say that a semi-structured interview is one that contains structured and unstructured sections with standardized and open-type questions.

The open-ended character of the question in semi-structured interviewing, not only specifies the topic under inquiry but it also allows the interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more depth. If the interviewee is having trouble answering a question or just gives a quick response, the interviewer might utilise cues or prompts to further encourage the interviewee to consider the question. In this type of interview, the interviewer also has the option of probing the interviewee further to clarify the original response or to pursue a line of inquiry initiated by the interviewee.

An example would be:

Interviewer: I'd like to hear your perspectives on how incorporating ICT tools into the classroom has affected the teaching-learning process. Has your teaching style altered in any way?

Interviewee: Absolutely!

Interviewer: In what way has it altered?

Some of the strengths and limitations of semi-structured interview are as follows:

Strengths:

- It has flexibility.

- It provides opportunities for the interviewer and interviewee to discuss the subject matter in more detail.

- It helps in collecting attitudinal information on a large scale.

- It helps when little is known about the subject area.

- Here, the interviewer has the freedom to probe.

Limitations:

- It is much more time-consuming than structured interviews.

- As it uses open-ended questions, it is difficult to maintain uniformity across respondents.

- Here, there is a possibility that the interviewer can be biased.

- It necessitates careful planning and preparation in developing the interview schedule, performing the interview, and analysing the interview data.
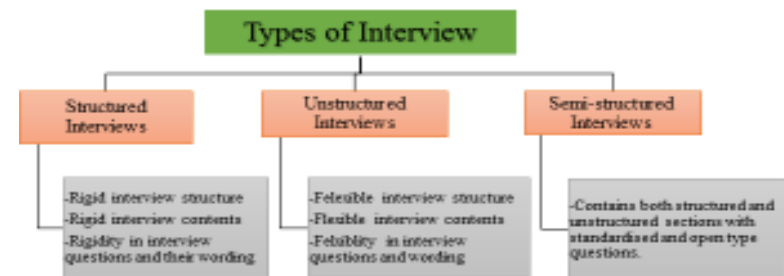
The above all three types of interviews can be conducted in various forms. It can be conducted in the form of a personal or group interview or telephone interview.

Personal Interview: In a personal interview, the interviewer reads the questions to the respondent in a face-to-face setting and records the answers. One of the most critical aspects of this form of interview is its flexibility. The interviewer has the opportunity to observe the subject and the entire situation in which he/she is responding. Questions can be repeated, or their meanings explained

in case they are not understood by the respondents. The interviewer can also press for additional information when a response seems incomplete or not entirely relevant.

There are many advantages of a personal interview like it allows for greater depth of information which is not possible by any other means. It has a greater response rate as respondents become more involved. It allows better control over the interview. It provides direct data about the feelings, attitudes, or emotions of the interviewer. The interview is more appropriate for complex situations. It is useful for collecting in-depth information (Sahoo, 2021).

On the contrary, there are also so many limitations of personal interviews, such it is time-consuming and more expensive. There is a possibility of interviewer bias. There is subjectivity due to the interviewer's bias. There is also a possibility of social desirability bias, in which respondents want to please the interviewer by giving socially acceptable responses. The validity and reliability of the data obtained through personal interviews greatly depend upon the interviewer's skill (Sahoo, 2021).

Telephone Interviews: The telephone interview is popular, and studies show it compares quite favourably with face-to-face interviewing. This method of collecting information involves contacting the respondents on the telephone itself. This can be utilised when a face-to-face interview is not feasible and may be appropriate when the topic is not sensitive and non-verbal behaviour is less significant. In carrying out a telephone interview, as an interviewer, you need to adhere to some specific practicalities, such as:

- You need to ensure that the line quality is adequate and that your respondent can hear you.
- You must ensure that you are able to capture both sides of the discussion using proper recording technology.
- Ensure you agree for the interview to take place at a time when your respondent will not be disturbed.

- Double-check that your phone bill (not your respondent's) is being charged for the call.
- Avoid utilising conference calling to conduct group interviews: it is difficult to create rapport among a group of individuals over the phone.

Nias (1991), Oppenheim (1992), and Borg and Gall (1996) suggest several attractions to telephone interviewing. It is sometimes very effective and economical than face-to-face interviewing. It can be conducted over a relatively short time span with people scattered over a large geographical area. It is useful for gaining rapid responses to a structured questionnaire. Many groups, particularly busy people, can be reached at times more convenient to them. They are safer to undertake than, for example, having to visit dangerous neighborhoods. They can be used to collect sensitive data, as possible feelings of the threat of face-to-face questions about awkward, embarrassing, or difficult matters are absent. Response rate is higher than, for example, questionnaires (Sahoo, 2021).

In addition to several strengths, there are also several weaknesses of telephone interviewing. It provides less opportunity for establishing rapport with the respondent than in a face-to-face situation. It takes a great deal of skill to carry out a telephone interview so that valid results are obtained. Complex questions are sometimes difficult for respondents to follow in a telephone interview. The phenomenon of multitasking may affect the quality of telephone interviews. There is a chance of skewed sampling, as not all of the population have a telephone. Respondents may not disclose information because of uncertainty about confidentiality. Respondents may withhold important information or tell lies, as the non-verbal behaviour that frequently accompanies this is not witnessed by the interviewer. It is often more difficult for complete strangers to communicate by telephone than face-to-face, particularly as non-verbal cues are absent (Sahoo, 2021).

Group Interview/Focus Groups: A specific category of interviews is the focus group. It is like a group interview where you are trying to collect shared understanding from several individuals at the same time. In this type of interview, the interviewer invites people who are interested in the same general topic to assemble to discuss it. They are assured that they will be free to express themselves in their own words and to respond not only to the interviewer but also to other participants and their responses. When conducting a focus-group interview, it is also important to ensure that all participants have their say and not something to be dominated by one or two participants. Using a structured or semi-structured interview schedule, an interviewer can pose questions to the group and encourage all participants to respond.

Some of the advantages of focus groups are here participants respond not only to the researcher but also to other participants and their responses. The interaction between participants usually reveals more about the subjects' point of view than would be the case with an interviewer-dominated interview. It enables the researcher to see how subjects incorporate the viewpoints of others in structuring their own understanding.

In addition to the advantages mentioned above, group interviews may be beneficial in the following situations:

- To develop a research question by drawing on the collective wisdom of participants.
- When the researcher lacks the necessary expertise or skill to conduct in-depth individual interviews and intends to encourage participants to converse in order to offer useful information about the setting.
- Where there may be a variety of viewpoints, and the amount to which participants agree or disagree on anything is of interest to the researcher.
- To evaluate the theoretical proposition of the researcher, based on past data gathering and analysis

- To come to an agreement among participants on the 'best method' to do something (the 'Delphi' technique).

Online Interview: Over the last few decades, the technological changes and growth of the Internet have developed opportunities for online interviewing in social science research and have reduced the problems related to face-to-face interviews. The Internet has altered the nature of the context in which research can take place and how knowledge is constructed by offering a different space and dimension in which conventional research designs and methods can be used and adapted. The use of online research methods in social science research has enabled researchers to communicate with geographically dispersed individuals and groups, not only with real-time and non-real-time conversation but also with the ability to actually see the person on the other end of the technological device. Online interviews can be used to gather original data via the Internet with the intention of analysing it to provide new evidence in relation to a specific research question (Kivits, 2005).

Online interviews have some distinct advantages. This is extremely cheap to conduct compared to a face-to-face interview. They are likely to take longer, however, especially when conducted asynchronously. It involves people with almost no time for participation. It also makes it easier for participants to discuss potentially embarrassing issues or to divulge potentially unpopular views. Participants are less likely to be influenced by characteristics like the age, ethnicity, or appearance of other participants. The interviewer bias is less likely (Bryman, 2015).

There are also several disadvantages of online interviewing. There are certainly significant issues with developing rapport, and nonverbal behaviour will be completely overlooked. However, some research shows that in this style, respondents may be more likely to be candid about personal problems. Issues of the authenticity of identity may also be an issue. It demands greater

commitment and motivation for completing an interview. Only people with access to online facilities and/or who find them relatively straightforward are likely to be in a position to participate in this type of interview (Bryman, 2015).

In addition to the above, Patton (1980) suggested variations in interview instrumentation with respect to various types of interviews, their characteristics, and strengths and weaknesses.

Variations in Interview Instrumentation

Type of interview	Characteristics	Strengths	Weaknesses
1 Informal conversational interview	Questions emerge from the immediate context and are asked in the natural course of things; there is no predetermination of question topics or wording.	Increases the salience and relevance of questions; interviews are built on and emerge from observations; the interview can be matched to individuals and circumstances.	Different information collected from different people with different questions. Less systematic and comprehensive if certain questions don't arise 'naturally'. Data organization and analysis can be quite difficult.
2 Interview guide approach	Topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance, in outline form; interviewer decides sequence and working of questions in the course of the interview.	The outline increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes data collection somewhat systematic for each respondent. Logical gaps in data can be anticipated and closed. Interviews remain fairly conversational and situational.	Important and salient topics may be inadvertently omitted. Interviewer flexibility in sequencing and wording questions can result in substantially different responses, thus reducing the comparability of responses.
3 Standardized open-ended interviews	The exact wording and sequence of questions are determined in advance. All interviewees are asked the same basic questions in the same order.	Respondents answer the same questions, thus increasing comparability of responses; data are complete for each person on the topics addressed in the interview. Reduces interviewer effects and bias when several interviewers are used. Permits decision-makers to see and review the instrumentation used in the evaluation. Facilitates organization and analysis of the data.	Little flexibility in relating the interview to particular individuals and circumstances; standardized wording of questions may constrain and limit naturalness and relevance of questions and answers.
4 Closed quantitative interviews	Questions and response categories are determined in advance. Responses are fixed; respondent chooses from among these fixed responses.	Data analysis is simple; responses can be directly compared and easily aggregated; many short questions can be asked in a short time.	Respondents must fit their experiences and feelings into the researcher's categories; may be perceived as impersonal, irrelevant, and mechanistic. Can distort what respondents really mean or experienced by so completely limiting their response choices.

Source Patton, 1980:206

Procedure of Interview

The effectiveness of an interview depends on the quality of the interviewer. Whether the interview is conducted in person or by telephone, the interviewer's main job is to conduct the interview in such a way that it helps obtain valid responses accurately and completely. Kvale (1996) sets out a range of qualifications for an effective interviewer that he/she should be structuring in making clear the purpose, conduct, completion of the interview; knowledgeable of the subject matter so that an informed conversation can be held; clear in the choice of language and in the presentation of subject matter; gentle in enabling subjects to say what they want to say in its entirety and in their own time and way; sensitive in employing empathic, active listening, taking account of non-verbal communication and how something is said; open and sensitive to which aspects of the interview are significant for the interviewee; remembering means recalling earlier statements and relating to them during the interview; and should be critical in questioning to check the reliability, consistency, and validity of what is being said. Regarding the procedure of an interview, it mainly involves three broad phases: (1) preparing for the interview, (2) conducting the interview, and (3) recording the interview.

1. Preparing for the interview: In order to obtain valid information, the interview must be planned beforehand. The interviewer should decide which type of interview will be suitable to the nature of the data required, whether it will be structured or unstructured or semi-structured. The researcher should also decide the procedure of recording the interview. If required, a try-out may be done. The interviewer should also plan the questions fit for eliciting the desired data. Patton (1990) observed that the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer. Hence, he suggested an interviewer must keep a few things in his mind before conducting an interview.

- ✓ The interviewer needs training in how to contact and approach potential participants.

- ✓ Possible participants should be approached in a friendly and professional manner, and, whenever possible, these first contacts should be in person. This is very important because potential participants may decide not to participate if they are approached poorly.

- ✓ The interviewer must understand his role. He should not express any opinions and should advise the participants that he is not going to be judgmental in any way.

- ✓ The interviewer should be clear in mind regarding the objectives, scope of the research area under study.

2. Conducting the interview: Rapport is an essential element of the interview. So, first of all, the interviewer should establish a good rapport with the interviewee so that the interviewee feels comfortable in revealing his feelings. The interviewer should behave in a friendly manner with the interviewee. The interviewer should follow the certain guideline for conducting interviews which are as follows:

Guidelines for Conducting Interviews

- ✓ The interviewer should plan in advance the venue, time, etc., of the interview session.

- ✓ He/she should have a friendly approach so that a proper understanding/rapport can be established between the interviewer and interviewee.

- ✓ He/she should have the ability to mobilise the respondent to answer freely and frankly on the subject.

- ✓ Questions should be well framed. Complex questions should be avoided. Such questions should be added, which will elicit the desired answers.

- ✓ He/she should be properly trained to have proper control of the interview session.

- ✓ He/she should be responsible for creating a friendly atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence.

- ✓ He/she should not show any surprise or disapproval to the answers of the respondent, but at the same time, he/she should be supportive of the respondent's answers.

- ✓ He/she should have a friendly, courteous, unbiased approach.

- ✓ He/she should be non-judgemental and should not try to change or influence the reactions or opinions of the respondents.

- ✓ The interviewer should not indulge in any argument, even though he/she may know that respondent's replies are not accurate.

- ✓ At the end of the interview session, the interviewer must show gratitude for their cooperation. The respondent should feel that they are actively participating in the research process and their views are valuable and important to research.

Turny & George (1970) have suggested the following techniques of interviewing:

- ✓ Relevant questions should be drafted based on the area of research.

- ✓ Ask only one question at a time.

- ✓ Repeat a question if necessary.

- ✓ Try to make sure that the interview understands the questions.

- ✓ Complex, emotional and sensitive types of questions should be avoided.

- ✓ Listen carefully to the interviewee's answer.

- ✓ Observe the facial expression, gesture, tone of voice, etc.

- ✓ Allow sufficient time to answer questions.
- ✓ Do not suggest an answer to questions.
- ✓ Do not show signs of surprise, shock, anger if unexpected answers are given.
- ✓ Maintain a neutral attitude.
- ✓ Take note of answers.

According to Field and Morse (1989), there are several problems in the actual conduct of an interview that can be anticipated and, possibly, prevented, ensuring that the interview proceeds comfortably, for example:

- ✓ Avoiding interruptions from outside (e.g., telephone calls, people knocking on the door).
- ✓ Minimizing distractions.
- ✓ Minimizing the risk of 'stage fright' in interviewees and interviewers.
- ✓ Avoiding asking embarrassing or awkward questions.
- ✓ Jumping from one topic to another.
- ✓ Summarizing too early or closing off an interview too soon.
- ✓ Being too superficial.

3. Recording the interview: It is the third important aspect of interviewing. The interviewer may use a schedule or a voice recording device like a tape-recorder or microphone or a video camera to record the interview. These electronic devices provide an opportunity to evaluate the gesture and facial expressions of the interviewee. But when these devices are not available, the interviewer may take note of the data.

Reliability and Validity of an Interview

In the social sciences, it is impossible to have a research tool that is hundred percent accurate, not only because a research instrument cannot be so but also because it is impossible to control the factors affecting the reliability and validity. Interview as a tool also suffers from several factors such as the wording of questions, physical setting, respondent's mood, interviewer's mood, nature of the interaction, and many more. However, one of the most important factors that strongly affect the reliability and validity of an interview is the amount of bias. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2018) suggest perhaps the most practical way of achieving greater reliability and validity of an interview is to minimize the amount of bias as much as possible. The sources of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics of the respondent, and the substantive content of the questions. More particularly, these will include the attitudes, opinions, and expectations of the interviewer; a tendency for the interviewer to see the respondent in their own image; a tendency for the interviewer to seek answers that support his/her preconceived notions; misperceptions on the part of the interviewer of what the respondent is saying; and misunderstandings on the part of the respondent of what is being asked.

Similarly, Oppenheim (1992) suggests several causes of bias in interviewing like biased sampling; the poor rapport between interviewer and interviewee; changes to question wording; poor prompting and biased probing; poor use and management of support materials; alterations to the sequence of questions; inconsistent coding of responses; elective or interpreted recording of data/transcripts; and poor handling of difficult interviews. In addition to the above, studies have also shown that race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, status, social class, and age in certain contexts can be potent sources of bias, i.e., interviewer effects (Lee, 1993; Scheurich, 1995). Interviewers and interviewees alike bring their own, often unconscious experiential and biographical baggage with them into the interview situation. Indeed Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) argue that because interviews are interpersonal, humans interact with humans, it is inevitable that the researcher

will have some influence on the interviewee and, thereby, on the data.

Hence, to ensure the greater reliability and validity of an interview, there is a strong need to minimize the amount of bias as much as possible. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2018) suggest in order to reduce the amount of bias in an interview, the training of the interviewer is quite essential as it will make the interviewer more aware of the possible problems. Silverman (1993) suggests that it is crucial for each interviewee to understand the question in the same way. He suggests that the reliability and validity of interviews can be enhanced by: careful piloting of interview schedules, training of interviewers, inter-rater reliability in the coding of responses, and the extended use of closed questions. In specific reactions to the reliability of the interview, he further suggests one way of controlling for reliability is to have a highly structured interview, with the same format and sequence of words and questions for each respondent. He suggests that changes in wording, context, and emphasis undermine reliability because it ceases to be the same question for each respondent.

Conclusion

Interviewing covers structured, semi-structured and unstructured approaches. You should be able to explain the key benefits and drawbacks of each of these methods, as well as face-to-face, telephone, and focus group interviews. I have looked in detail at the preparation for interviewing, as well as the structure of these various types of interviews, and the skills and tactics required for a successful interview.

Interviewing is a significant data gathering approach in social science research and is used in many research investigations, particularly when data on experiences or beliefs is required. The theory may be learned from a text like this, but what is also required is praxis!

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