

An Assessment of Interviewing Methods in Psychological Research

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to assess the various components of interview structure used as a method of instrument in psychological research. The paper highlights the major strata in interviewing methods ranging from the structure, piloting, conducting and the medium of interview. The paper also examined validity and reliability of the interview data and finally reporting interview research. Methodology, Conclusion and recommendations were provided.

Keywords: Assessment, interview, methods and psychological research.

Introduction

An interview is an infinitely flexible instrument for research. It has no specific procedure for usage, but can be made flexible to includes other techniques or alongside other data eliciting methodology. An interview can be analyzed at any level of the research. In other words, interview can be employed at the middle, beginning or conclusion of the research (Glynis,2006).

Research interview require a very systematic approach to data collection, analysis and description that allows you to maximizes the chances of achieving meaningful valid and reliable conclusions.

It is important to note that no method of collecting information is free of mistakes, like any other methods, it has to be used with care and in the full knowledge of its limitations.

Interviewing as a research tool is not tied to any one theory, epistemological orientation (whether constructivist or positivist), or philosophical tradition. Researchers from virtually all approaches will use interviewing at some time. This may be because interviews are the vehicle for deploying many more specific data collection methods. It is also because interviews are flexible in format and function. They can be configured to produce many types of information and, perhaps more importantly, the data they generate can be interpreted and presented in different ways (Glynis 2006).

Research Problem

Researchers face a lot of difficulties in the design, conduct, analysis and reporting of interview used as research methods. The problems of selecting of sample to be interviewed, structuring data for interpretation, and issues affecting the validity and reliability of information collected pose a serious threat to researchers. The problem of this research,

therefore, is to identify these difficulties and offer useful explanations on how they can be resolved. Similarly, common problems which need to be avoided when using interview will be adequately elaborated.

Objectives of the Research

- i. Explain the concept of interview in psychological research
- ii. Examine the procedures to be observed in psychological interview

Research Questions

- i. Is there any significant difference in the definition and concept of assessing interview in psychological research?
- ii. Is there any significant difference in the methods of assessing interview in psychological research?

Methodology and Research Procedure

The method employed by this study is the survey research design. In this research design, a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered being representatives of the entire group (Akuizuilo 1993).

Literature Review

Bull (2004) elucidates the value of analyzing verbal and non - verbal components of interview. Fielding's (2003) provide guides to the ways in which interviewing can be effectively used in research.

Akuizuelo (1993) noted that the interviewer must have a clear conception of just what information the researcher needs. He must clearly outline the best sequence of questions and stimulating comments that will systematically bring out the desired responses. This can be done by preparing before the interview a written outline, schedule, or check list of the plan for the interview.

Akuizuelo (1993) posited that when interview is well conducted, it is often superior to other research instrument because people are usually more willing to talk than to write. After the interviewer gains rapport or establishes a friendly secure relationship with the interviewee, certain types of confidential information an individual might be reluctant to put down in writing may be obtained. He observed that validity and reliability of the interview are generally enhanced by establishing rapport. This can be further improved when the interview is based upon a carefully designed structure, thus ensuring that significant information is elicited.

Eric (2009) identified situations where interview is necessary. He explained that information may be measurable but requires much time and funds to carry out physical measurement. Or the event may be measurable which though can be directly observed, relate to the past. Also, it could be a case of where information cannot because of social or practical reasons, be directly observed; or it may be information about peoples' knowledge, opinions,

attitudes, beliefs, perception and values. These situations and similar ones necessitate the use of interview method to gather information.

Eric (2009) noted that different kinds of interview are suitable for different kind of situation; the researcher has to make up his mind whether the interview will be unstructured and free-ranging or structured and restrictive; and whether the interview content will be closed or opened-ended questions or a combination of both. Unstructured interviews are free-ranging with high degree of flexibility and usually employ a general interview outline (otherwise called an interview guide). This kind of interview show flexibility in timing and/or in the order of asking questions and in the question asked. The questions are generally opened – ended, since the respondents are unrestricted in what and how he/she answers.

Significance of the Study

One of the major significances of interview method is that it can be used at any stage in the research process. They can be used in the initial phases to identify areas or issues for more detailed exploration. It can be used as part of the piloting and validation of other instruments. Interview can also be used as the main vehicle of data collection. It can be used when findings have been compiled to check whether your interpretation of other type of data makes sense to the participants who are involved (Glynis, 2006).

The Structure:

The research questions have to be adequately specified and targeted to the aimed participants. Questions must be specifically asked and say exactly what they are expected to say, if the participant could not understand the interview questions there is need for translation so that the participant can understand. This will facilitate the interview process to ensure that the participant answered exactly what they are expected to answer. It is also important to note that the nature of the research questions will go a long way in determining the participants to be selected.

Piloting the Interview:

Interview schedule needs to be adequately piloted. This is because there are hiccups in getting the individual interview questions, their order of priority and the relationship among the questions. An interview needs to be tested and constantly fine-tuned to meet the ability of the participants. The following steps will help in piloting an interview schedule:

- i. Test to find out whether your explanation in the interview is clearly understood by a small sample drawn from the same population from the people you intend to interview.
- ii. Employ the use of the same pilot sample to test the comprehension of a particular question which has not been use in the population.
- iii. Amend the question and interview in the light of number one and two above.
- iv. It is better to fine-tuned question in the course of the piloting.

An interview that is properly conducted minimizes the chances of finding midway through piloting to have an impact in both structure and unstructured interview.

Conducting the Interview:

In conducting the interview, the following steps should be followed:

- i. Be thorough and clear with the interview schedules before you start
- ii. Ask all questions of all respondents
- iii. Know what each question is meant to achieve or tap
- iv. Be consistent in recording answers
- v. Encode non-verbal aspect of the answers even though when visual recording is not used

Medium of the Interview:

There are three recording procedures as follows:

- i. Note-taking or during or immediately after the interview
- ii. Audio recording of the interview
- iii. Audio visual recording of the interview

Validity and Reliability of the Interview:

Like any other self-report method, the interview approach depends upon respondent ability to give accurate and complete answer to the question asked irrespective of their formats. Problems relating to distrust or lack of interest of the respondent, unable to answer accurately because of their inability to recognize and remember the details or because they could not understand the question could be resolve by ensuring that a systematic type of question were constructed in such a way that will help the respondent to remember and understand what is being asked. Consistency of response does not necessarily guarantee accuracy, but inconsistency definitely brings about inaccuracy.

Another method of establishing the validity of interview data is to complement it with other types of data. For instance, you might use observation, or experimental procedures along with the interview. To ensure that the interview is effective, it will be okay to take additional evidences from a subsample of the population.

Other factors that affects the validity of the interview are, the researcher and the interviewer effects, though cannot be eliminated in totality, but steps can be used to control their overall effects. Some of these effects may not necessarily apply today. Interviewer effects can be handled by using many interviewers and randomly allocate them to respondents. This will make it possible to eradicate any strong effects of any one interviewer. Interview data collected by each interviewer are compared with those collected by others.

Similarly, interviewer effects can be control by using some mechanical methods for recording them, videotaping captures the fuller range of information i.e. (nonverbal

communication) in either way, the record is permanent and open to verification by other researchers.

Analyzing Interview Data

Researcher using interview as a research instrument to collect enormous data realized that they become difficult to analyze. First view the data collected critically. The content analysis can be used to minimize the data to a manageable size and shape.

Try to find out the missing link in your interview and try to fill it in such a way that there will be a flow of information. Try to find out the missing link and try to put in the missing link what is absent in the interview test. Best researches rely on identifying what is omitted from what the respondents says in order to draw conclusions.

Secondly, your analysis should be open to verification as far as possible. Provide accurate description of the data in which on which you base your conclusion which make it possible for someone to repeat you research and check your conclusion. Following these guidelines will help you to produce a relevant and focused analysis of the interview material. Additionally, the analysis you choose must be in conformity with the measurement level of the data collected.

Reporting Interview Research

Interview research must take the following format:

- i. Clear statement of the research questions
- ii. Characteristics of the sample, number, relevance, socio-demographic background (e.g. age, gender, educational status)
- iii. Details of how the sample was located and
- iv. Description of context in which interview took place
- v. Details of the interview (s) involved
- vi. Details of response -recording methods
- vii. Details of data - structuring technique used
- viii. Description of how raw data are being stored and accessibility for other analyst
- ix. Discussion of implication of findings for the research questions originally posed
- x. Consideration of the methodological weaknesses
- xi. Conclusion of future research in the area

Conclusion

Interview is a very important research instrument used in the collection of data. Consideration should be given to the design, structure, conduct and piloting. Similarly, validity and reliability of the interview data, analysis and reporting of the interview research should be strictly adhered to.

Recommendations

- i. Researchers using Interview as a research instrument must ensure that it is well design, structured and conducted using clear guide lines.
- ii. Interview questions must be systematically set to help the respondents understands what is expected of him/her.
- iii. Use pattern of questions that allows for internal consistency checking, providing evidence of consistency across responses.
- iv. Initial training of the interviewers will serve to heighten their awareness of their own prejudices relevant to the research topic
- v. Excludes interviewer bias
- vi. In analyzing data, allow your research questions serve as act of a prism through which you view the data collected.
- vii. Ensure that any research report is accurate and comprehensive.

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