

Interview

Interviews have been used for data collection in many disciplines especially in social sciences. Interview provides a qualitative method of gathering data or information. Responses collected through interview are not usually expressed in numerical terms like questionnaire. If we are planning to conduct interviews as part of a research, the first things to consider are who we will interview, what kind of information we want to obtain, and the type of interview that will help us to do that. Mostly scholars and scientists mention following types of interviews:

Unstructured Interview: This type of interview often involves qualitative data, it is also called qualitative interviewing. The interviewer does not have any specific list of questions during data collection through unstructured interview. The interview may be like a conversation in which the interviewer responds to the interviewee and make him free to speak all details about the issue under investigation.

Semi-structured Interview: In some researches, interviewers have lists of questions or key points to be covered. The researchers collect data in a orderly manner. Similar questions are asked of each interviewee, although additional questions can be asked as appropriate. The interviewee can respond how they like and does not have to 'tick a box' with their answer.

Structured Interview: When the interviewer asks the interviewee a series of specific questions, to which a fixed range of answers are possible ('ticking a box'). This is the typical form of interview used in social survey research, and can provide quantitative data, as in a questionnaire.

Patton (1987) suggests three basic approaches to conducting qualitative interviewing:

The informal conversational interview

This type of interview is like a chat, during which the informants may sometimes forget that they are being interviewed. Most of the questions will flow from the immediate context. Informal conversational interviews are useful for exploring interesting topic/s for investigation.

The general interview guide approach (guided interview)

When employing this approach for interviewing, a basic checklist is prepared to make sure that all relevant topics are covered. The interviewer is still free to explore, probe and ask questions deemed interesting to the researcher. The general interview guide approach is useful as it ‘allows for in-depth probing within the parameters decided by the aim of the study.

The standardised open-ended interview

Researchers using this approach prepare a set of open-ended questions which are carefully worded and arranged for the purpose of minimising variation in the questions asked from the interviewees. This method is often preferred for collecting interviewing data when two or more researchers are involved in the data collecting process.

Interviewing Techniques

One essential element of all interviews is the verbal interaction between the interviewers and the interviewees. Individuals vary in their ability to express their thoughts and ideas. It is important for the researchers to familiarise themselves with important techniques before conducting interviews. With good questioning techniques, researchers will be able to get relevant and required information.

Clear questions: It is important to use words that make sense to the interviewees. Questions should be easy to understand and short.

Single questions: Interviewers often put several questions together and ask them all as one. Researchers should ask one thing at a time. This will eliminate any unnecessary burden on the interviewees.

Truly open-ended questions: Truly open-ended questions do not pre-determine the answers and allow room for the informants to respond in their own terms.

Experience/behaviour questions before opinion/feeling questions: It is useful to ask questions about experience or behaviour before asking questions about opinions or feelings as this helps establish a context for the informants to express feelings.

Sequence the questions: Researcher should ask from general to specific, from broad to narrow.

Probe & follow-up questions: The purpose of probing is to deepen the response to a question, to increase the richness of the data being obtained, and to give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired.

Interpret questions: Throughout the interview, the researchers should clarify and extend the meanings of the interviewee's statements to avoid misinterpretations on their part.

Avoid sensitive questions: It is advisable to avoid deep questions which may irritate the informants, possibly resulting in an interruption of the interview.

Establish rapport: Researchers should respect the informants' opinions, support their feelings and recognise their responses. This can also be shown by the researchers' tone of

voice, expressions or even gestures. A good contact is established by attentive listening, with the interviewer showing interest, understanding, and respect for what the informants say.

Recording the interview

In both unstructured and semi-structured interviews a method of recording the responses is required. This can be by digital recording or note taking (with the informed consent of the interviewee). We should make sure that our interviewees have agreed to be interviewed. If they agree to be interviewed but decline to be recorded we can still go ahead with the interview, although our note taking would focus on writing down key points.

Transcription

When we complete interviews, we have to transcribe our notes by copying what was said into a word-processed document. Modern digital recorders allow you to download a recording onto a computer and then slow it down to a useful speed. Transcribing can take a very long time - a ten-minute interview could take one hour or more to transcribe.

Analysing interviews

When we have transcribed interviews, we may have a lot of data. Some of it would not be useful, perhaps because the interviewee gave background information which is not needed. We could pick out key points from collected data. We can code the information and can turn a qualitative interview into quantitative data. We can do this by identifying passages of text and applying labels to them to show that they are an example of a theme. For example, if you asked 20 people how they travelled to work and one of the answers given was 'by car' this would be one thematic code. 'By bike' could be another, as could 'walking', etc.