Effectiveness of Interviews as a Tool for Data Collection

EDWARD KWESI ACQUAH
University of Siegen, Siegen, Germany

Abstract:

The study aims to examine the effectiveness of interviews as a tool for data collection in qualitative research. Qualitative research methodology was used for the study after a careful review of literature. The study revealed that in effective interviews, pertinent questions are always asked before objective and factual ones. It was also discovered that to conduct interviews effectively in a comfortable setting, it is essential for the interviewer to let the respondents speak freely and at their own pace while making appropriate comments and asking probing questions as needed. Additionally, the researcher needs to guarantee that the interviewees are at comfortable and not in any danger. The study revealed that iterative data analysis ensures that the researcher constantly refers back to the data they have collected to guarantee that the information is valuable and reliable. The contact between the researcher and the respondent during the interview process allows for iteration while examining the data. The study further revealed that to reduce the chance of bias and improve the rigor of the data, the interviewer must be aware of and take into account these issues. Additionally, the researcher must ensure that the respondents understand the goal of the study, maintain their anonymity, and ensure their confidentiality by keeping their identities a secret.

Keywords: Interviews, Qualitative Research, Effectiveness, Interviewer, Interviewee, Researcher

1 INTRODUCTION

To study people's experiences and beliefs, a lot of techniques and processes are used in a qualitative research design. The focus of qualitative research has been on linguistic information that draws attention to issues while evaluating a particular topic from the perspectives of the research participants (Giles, 2013). According to Silverman (2016), qualitative research is very essential when trying to collect open-ended data. Qualitative design is very important for evaluating ideas, opinions, and viewpoints to display data as a whole. Additionally, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) also demonstrated how using a qualitative design greatly aids researchers in gathering a variety of data from a diverse population. Scholars have indicated that in order to perform academic and psychological research, qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and focus groups are mostly employed. Interview is a technique for gathering qualitative data that involves two people usually the interviewer and the interviewee discussing a particular social phenomenon or issue. By assessing the significance of the stated phenomena, the researcher frequently uses interview techniques to gain the perspective of the respondent (Kvale, 1996, p. 6). This adaptable strategy enables the interviewer and interviewee to delve further into a subject to explore a concept. In other words, interview as a tool for data collection involves conducting intensive face to face interview with a small group of respondents to investigate their ideas and views on

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certain issues or situations (Smith, 2015). Sandelowski (2002) argues that interviewing is typically regarded as the most common qualitative research technique used by many researchers. Additionally, interviews are easily included in a missed method approach together with other methodologies (Brewerton & Millward, 2001, p. 69).

Evidence suggests that interviews can be in a structured form, unstructured and semi-structured form. In the structured type of interview, the researcher is required to use the same questions for all the participants. In the structured form of interview, all the research participants respond to a set of preset questions. When analyzing data from structured interviews, researchers have the ability to compare different responses to the question (Babbie, 2007). According to Berg (2009), the concept underlying the structured type of interviewing is that the researcher can compare the answers given by the respondents. Evidence suggest that structured interviews are usually standard and are similar to questionnaire surveys just that the only variation comes in the order of the questions. The semi-structured interview gives the researcher the opportunity to either include or exclude any component of the listed questions. Tod (2006) contends that the semi-structured interview enables the researcher to take account of important questions needed for the research areas. The Semi-structured interviews are frequently used by researchers to allow interviewees to go into further detail about specific topics (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 136). Flexible question wording allows the interviewer to use a variety of linguistic nuances and provide clarifications (Berg, 2009). Due to the flexibility of the semi-structured interview, the interviewer has the chance to ask a sequence of less structured questions and also explore any issues that the interviewee independently brings up.

In contrast, there is no question guide needed for unstructured interviews. The unstructured interviews are typically the least dependable from a research point of view. The interview proceeds in the direction of the participant's response, and there is no predetermined way to respond to the questions (Moyle, 2002). Although an interview guide may be used, this style of interview is non-directive and typically consists of topics rather than particular questions (Moyle, 2002). There can be a lot bias when using unstructured interviews in the fact that it might be difficult in comparing the views of numerous respondents. The paper draws attention on interviews as a tool for data collection under qualitative research and will highlights on how researchers can make interviews as an effective tool for data collection. The paper seeks to elaborate on how interviews as an instrument for data collection help to achieve a good research results, increase the credibility and validity of research data. In doing so, the following questions will be taken into account: How can researchers make interviews as an effective tool for data collection, what are the nature of questions and question techniques when conducting interviews, what are the interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee during the process to gain a good response to a good research outcome. How can the researcher reduce bias and improve the rigor of data collection. What are some ethical considerations before, during and after the interview process. The above questions will give insights to the level to which interviewing as an instruments of data collection is successful in producing the expected research outcome. The rest of the paper was organised as follows: section two focused on the methods. Section three looked at the discussions. Lastly, the final section dealt with conclusions and recommendations

2.0 METHOD

The methodology of the qualitative approach has been examined and understood using the qualitative research strategy. In writing this paper, the researcher looked at published articles to understand the effectiveness of qualitative approaches based on interviews. Interviews studies, the most popular qualitative research method, have been selected. Scholarly searches aided the investigation of the usefulness of interviews as qualitative research technique. The study examined interviews as an effective tool for qualitative data collection. A review of the literature has analyzed interviews as qualitative technique, which has been used by numerous successful research types (Smith, 2015; Silverman, 2016; Taylor et al., 2015).

When gathering data through interviews, a researcher will often ask a subject about previously prepared questions. According to the question guide, the interviewer conducts the interviews with the participants. Through the interviewer's questions and comments, a bond is established. From the perspectives of the researcher and the participant. Interviews stand out as qualitative methods because of the participants' subjectivity, which is represented in the data gathered. The only research methodology used in the study was qualitative. However, to be studied in future studies are other tactics that are based on quantitative research approaches (Creswell, 2013).

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In qualitative research, it is crucial to examine the efficiency of interviews as a technique for data collecting. The interviews and qualitative study's major goal is thought to be the gathering of comprehensive data. To support the research findings, the participants can be asked to recall experiences from the past. The researcher can learn more about the participants when they react to the questions and provide in-depth information from their ideas and feelings.

Conducting interviews

Interviews for qualitative research are typically conducted face-to-face. This gives the researcher the chance to decipher nonverbal indicators by observing the participant's facial expression and body language, which might help the interviewer better understand what the participant is saying Legard et al (2003). This may help the researcher to gain better understanding and meanings to the answers given by the participants. In recent times, telephone and email interviews are used by researchers since both are recognized as the most cost effective way of conducting interviews. Meho (2006) contends that interviewing over the phone and over email are less intimidating and more tactful. When conducting interviews over the phone or over email, issues related to face-to-face interactions, such as interviewee self-consciousness and perceived status discrepancies between the interviewer and the interviewee, may be reduced (Meho, 2006). However, irrespective of the method used, for interview to be effective and achieve the expected research outcome, it is important that the type of interview is in line with the study's objectives and its research questions.

Nature of questions and question techniques: Interview schedule and interview guide

The first step in the interview process is to create an interview schedule or interview guide. For effective and successful interviews, the interview's format, the nature of the research questions, the aim of the study as well as the objectives of study should

determine the interview schedule or interview guide. It should, according to Piolit and Hungler (1995), include a list of categories that are pertinent to the study and serve as the foundation for the interview questions. It should be clear from the onset and for interviews to be effective and achieve the expected output in a qualitative research, simple, non-threatening questions like demographic details are helpful for setting the tone for the interview in a cordial way (Chapple, 2006). Important questions that directly relate to the study's principal topic should follow. The order in which the questions are asked should make it clear to the interviewee what specific topics are being covered. More personal questions should be kept until rapport and trust have been built and the interviewee is at ease (Trochim, 2005). For interview to be more effective as a tool for data collection, the order in which the questions are asked typically serves as the initial introduction to the verification of consent. Effective interviews ensure that crucial interview questions come before non-threatening, factual ones. For interview to achieve the needed research outcome, the researcher should ensure that delicate and challenging questions should always come later.

If necessary, Robson (2002) advises interviewers to utilize prompts. In order to allow the interviewee to elaborate on a certain topic or to reengage with the interview process if they lose their train of thought, prompts are helpful. By asking the interviewee to elaborate on a certain topic, probing questions help interviewers get additional information (Piolit and Hungler, 1995). For example, "Would you mind explaining that to me?" a researcher might explore deeper levels of meaning and look for consensus on a subject by offering probing questions. Evidence suggest that, the effectiveness of interview as a method of qualitative research largely depends on clear answers which is usually based precise questions. Before the actual interview, Berg (2009) contends that it is critical to pretest or pilot the interview schedule or interview guide. This can be done in collaboration with other academics or experts on the subject, and it makes it easier to spot questions that are confusing or inappropriate. Afterward, questions that are poorly phrased can be improved. In every effective interview, it is crucial for the researcher to pose questions that will provide data for the research. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to use caution when asking open-ended or generic questions. Closed questions that demand a "yes" or "no" response from the respondent are ineffective at obtaining pertinent data. The use of descriptive questions in interviews help to motivate the respondents to expand and elaborate on their stories and give more information needed for the research (Berg, 2009).

Interviewing and listening techniques: The interviewer and interviewee interactions

The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is crucial to the effectiveness of the process because an interview is a social engagement. Although the interview might be perceived as a chat between two persons, Kvale (1996) issues a warning that the two do not have an equal relationship. As a result, it's critical to build rapport and trust right away throughout the interview. According to Legard et al. (2003), executing this depends greatly on the interviewer's attitude. A positive interview connection will be aided by the interviewer's approach, which should be easygoing, confident, and attentive. A comfortable environment is crucial for effective interviews to make the participants feel at ease and unthreatened. Lathlean (2006) contends that active listening is another crucial component of effective interviews and that is the duty of the interviewer. For interviews to be effective and achieve the expected research outcome, the researcher should have an open posture, appropriate facial expressions, and strong eye contact. All these are indicators of active listening in both verbal and nonverbal

contexts. For a researcher to conduct effective interviews, it is important for the researcher to let the respondents speak. The interview is conversational in style, but aside from any inquiries for clarification, the interviewer makes no comments or passes judgment on the responses to the questions. Therefore, it is important for the interviewer to let the respondents speak freely and at their own pace while making relevant comments and probing questions as needed. This gives room for the interview flow smoothly (Roulston et al, 2003). Kvale (1996) contends that the interviewer's toolkit should also include the use of silence. When used as a tool to improve data gathering during the interview process, silence used while keeping good eye contact gives the interviewee time to pause and contemplate. Echoing or repeating the interviewee's words also shows that the interviewer is paying attention, which encourages the interviewee to continue the conversation.

During the process of conducting a successful and effective interview, the interviewee's role must also be taken into account. According to Berg (2009), participants may or may not disclose their complex and varied motivations for consenting to an interview. They might also feel anxious about how the interviewer will view them and how their answers will be assessed. If the interviewer's influence and the context of the interview shape a person's responses, it is the responsibility of the researcher to acknowledge this and act in a nonjudgmental manner (King & Horrocks, 2010). Interviews are usually shaped by both verbal and nonverbal messages occurring between the researcher and the respondents. There is a chance that the interviewee will hide information if the interviewer ignores what they perceive to be a very sensitive topic and presses on with the inquiry because they are either reluctant to share that information or fear the interviewer won't approve. However, there is a chance that the interview will go on if the interviewee is satisfied they won't pass judgment (Gordon, 2003). Therefore, the interviewer's interpretations of the cues and signs provided by the interviewee during the interview process are crucial. When dealing with interview effectively, the relationship that exist between the researcher and the subjects might develop more easily due to the interpersonal contacts between both the researcher and the respondents. "Development of relationship is often viewed as a critical aspect in successful qualitative interviewing" say King and Horrocks (2010). (p. 48). The interaction that take place during the interview process provides the necessary data along with any relevant supplementary information needed for the research. With interviews, data analysis is iterative; the researcher regularly refers back to the data they have gathered to make sure the material is accurate and has value. Doody and Noonan (2013) indicated that interaction between the researcher and the interviewee during the procedure enables iteration while the latter is examining the data. In a manner similar to this, the researcher may revisit and assess the data acquired to ensure that it is correct and significant (Taylor et al, 2015; Smith, 2015; Silverman, 2016).

Reducing bias and improving the rigor of data collection

Depending on how well-structured the interview is, the accuracy of the data gathered from it will change. Tod (2006) contends that a consistent strategy and well-crafted questions will assist establish rigor even with semi-structured or unstructured interviews. The way interviews are done, how interviewees are chosen, and whether or not the interviewer has affected the interview process all have the potential to introduce bias (Willing, 2013). To reduce the danger of bias and improve the rigor of the data, the interviewer must be aware of and reflect on these issues. Interview schedules, instructions, and paperwork that are precise and clear will help to overcome these

problems (Tod, 2006). In a similar vein, using a reflective journal and drawing on the interviewer's knowledge and observations during the interview process may serve to increase rigor. Another way that makes interview as an effective method of collecting qualitative data is the opportunity to clarify responses from respondents. After the researcher, has stated the questions to the in respondents, the researcher has the opportunity to clarify and elaborate responses (Koch, 2006). This help to increase the accuracy of data collected from respondents. This mighty not be possible when using other methods of data collection.

Ethical considerations guiding the interview process

One of the cardinal principles of social research has to do with ethical considerations. An effective research data depends on the rights of the participants to be protected under the research. In this regard, effective interviews have at its core to protect the participants' rights, and the issues of informed permission, anonymity, and secrecy are of utmost significance (Silverman, 2013). It is important for the researcher to fully explain the nature of the study and the format of the interview to study participants. According to Willing (2013), before the interview, written consent must be obtained, and participants for the interview should have enough time to decide if they want to participate or not. The consent of the participants should be confirmed before the start of the interview. Throughout the interview process, it's crucial to confirm consent by asking the interviewee if they want to continue if difficult topics come up or if they start to feel upset. It's crucial to make sure respondents comprehend the study while simultaneously protecting their anonymity and maintaining confidentiality by withholding their identities (Doody and Noonan, 2013). Any transcripts or recordings from interviews should be anonymous. Data should be safely saved on password-protected personal computers together with all features.

CONCLUSION

For a successful and a good research outcome, the interview schedule or interview guide should be determined by the interview's format, the type of the research questions, the purpose of the study, as well as the study's objectives. Effective interviews ensure that pressing questions are asked before neutral and factual ones. It is also critical for the interviewer to allow the respondents speak freely and at their own pace while offering pertinent comments and probing questions when necessary in order to conduct effective interviews in a relaxed environment. The researcher should also make sure the participants feel at ease and unthreatened during the interview process. Data analysis with effective interviews is iterative which ensure the researcher frequently goes back to the data they have collected to ensure the information is accurate and valuable. Iteration while reviewing the data is made possible by the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee during the interview process. The interviewer needs to be aware of and consider these problems in order to lessen the risk of bias and increase the rigor of the data. It is crucial that the researcher properly explain the study's purpose to the respondents, maintain their anonymity, and guarantee their confidentiality by keeping their identities a secret. Interviews are a good way to get information from respondents. However, it is costly and time-consuming.

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