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Conducting an interview for research: What you should know.

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Interviews are a common method to collect data in qualitative studies. It involves acquiring data directly from interviewees thus making it possible for researchers to probe deeply into personal experiences, opinions, and feelings. In qualitative research, these interviewees are known as participants, unlike the term "respondents" commonly used in quantitative studies. It is usually useful to identify the different types of interviews which are unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews.

Unstructured interview

➢Researcher uses a brief set of prompts to deal with a certain range of topics
➢There may be just a single question and the interviewee is then allowed to respond freely
➢Very similar to a conversation
➢Useful in eliciting life histories and biographies

Semi-structured interview

➢The researcher has a list of questions or specific topics to be covered
➢Guided by identified themes in a consistent & systematic manner
➢Adopts a flexible approach to the sequencing and wording of questions
➢Use probes to elicit further elaboration.

Structured interview

➢Asking all interviewees the same predetermined set of questions in the same order
➢Helps ensure that responses can be directly compared and analyzed systematically

By using interviews, researchers have access to rich and complex insights that are frequently unavailable through other methods such as surveys and content analysis. Interviews can be conducted in several ways: either face-to-face, telephone calls or even using online meeting platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom and Webex. Researchers can also choose whether to conduct an interview with a single participant or have it with a group of them. However, before going to the interviews, careful planning and designing of interview protocol is essential.

An interview protocol is a structured guideline that researchers follow when conducting interviews. It usually has information as follows:

Introduction	A brief section where the interviewer introduces themselves, explains the purpose of the interview, the expected duration, and how the data will be used. This part also covers obtaining informed consent from the participant.
Warm-up Questions	These are easy, ice-breaking questions used to build rapport with the participant and make them feel comfortable.
Main Questions	The core of the interview, featuring carefully designed questions that align with the research objectives. Often, this is a mixture of specific questions and open-ended questions. The questions should be ordered in a logical sequence to guide the interview smoothly from one focus to the next.
Probing Questions	The interviewer should also ask on-the-spot questions to dig deeper into interesting or unclear responses provided by the participant.
Closing Questions	This is to allow participants to add anything else they think is relevant or to reflect on the topics discussed.
Closing Remarks	The interviewer thanks the participant, explains the next steps on how and when the results will be shared, and officially ends the interview.

The ability of the researcher to effectively design and perform interviews is crucial. Thus, many factors contribute towards the success of interviews. A novice interviewer is understandably worried about conducting interviews for the first time. However, by going through the process, researchers should be able to master the art of interviewing in no time. As the saying goes, *practice makes perfect*. There is no short cut way to excel except to experience it first-hand.

Effective interviewing in research studies requires meticulous planning, skilful execution, and thoughtful analysis. By understanding the types of interviews, preparing thoroughly, formulating insightful questions, conducting the interview with sensitivity and flexibility, researchers can unearth valuable insights that significantly contribute to their fields of study.

Theories of education: Shaping the learning landscape

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Education is influenced by a diverse range of theories that shape its fundamental principles, approach, and outcomes. Educational theories provide educators, policymakers, and researchers with frameworks to enhance their understanding, analysis, and enhancement of the learning process. This article analyses prominent educational theories, exploring their historical background, key principles, and implications for contemporary learning, specifically focusing on behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism.

Behaviourism

Originating in the early twentieth century, behaviourism stands as one of the most ancient educational concepts. Behaviourism, developed by psychologists John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner, focuses on observable behaviours and external stimuli. In other words, every behaviour is acquired through learnt habits, and studies are made to explain how these habits are developed. For example, to instil the habit of being seated during the class session, a potential incentive for well-behaved students could be the privilege of starting recess five minutes ahead of others. Behaviourism has had a significant impact on the development of structured and outcome-focused teaching methods and tactics for modifying behaviour in educational environments.
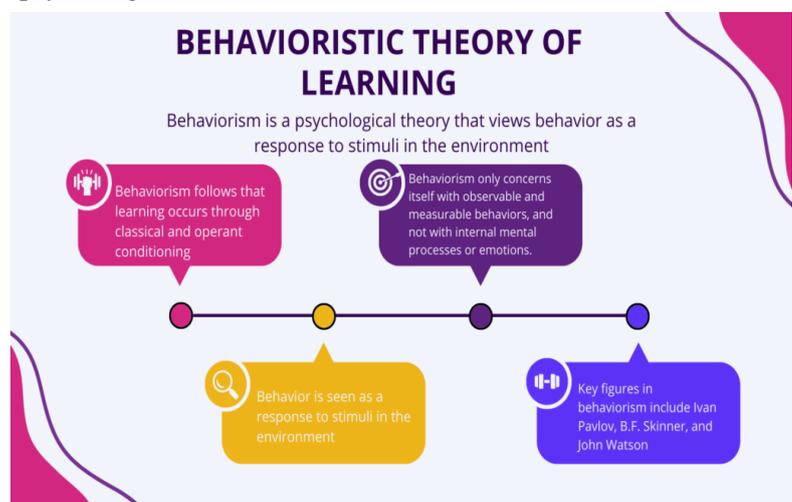

Figure 1: Behaviouristic theory of learning (Main, P., 2023)

Cognitivism

Cognitivism emphasizes how important brain processes are to learning. Cognitivism theories highlight the significance of comprehending internal cognitive processes, memory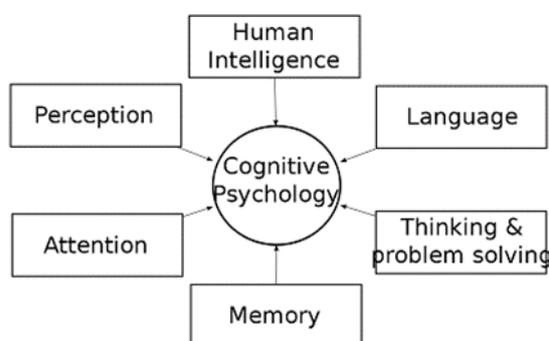 function, and information processing. For example, students are provided with a case study problem or phenomenon to examine. They generate their own theories, do research, gather and analyse data, and create conclusions. This technique facilitates students in establishing connections between their preexisting knowledge and new information. Renowned researchers in this field include Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget. The focus that cognitivism places on problem-solving, critical thinking, and metacognition has greatly influenced the creation of curriculum development, teaching methodologies, and assessment techniques.

Figure 2: Cognitive Psychology (Morales, A., 2023)

Constructivism

Constructivism asserts that learning is an active, social process in which people construct knowledge through meaningful interactions with their surroundings. Scholars including Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner have contributed to the evolution of constructivist ideas. In constructivist classrooms, students investigate, ask questions, and work together, promoting a deeper comprehension of ideas. An example of applying constructivism in teaching an accounting course is to assign students the task of producing a full set of financial reports. The students would start a process to learn the recording process, which would theoretically provide a thorough understanding of accounting concepts. The acquisition of knowledge would mostly occur through the process of trial and error, as the learners applied their previous experiences to the present task. Technology and project-based learning frequently reflect constructivist ideas, emphasizing student-driven research and practical applications.

Figure 3: Constructivism (Druvenga, K., 2022)

Conclusion

As a conclusion, whether they are behaviourist, cognitivist, or constructivist, educational theories are fundamental in determining how learning takes place. These theories provide insightful understandings of the ways in which students learn, grow, and interact with the educational process. Although there is no single theory that can adequately explain the complexity of education, integrating and adapting several theories helps create learning environments that are both effective and diverse. A careful examination of these theories can help educators make sense of the constantly shifting educational landscape as they build curriculum, implement new regulations, and implement pedagogical strategies that will ultimately improve the quality of education for students worldwide.

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